HAMAS'S REAL CASUALTY

RUTH FRANKLIN: The Trouble with Book Reviewing

JEFFREY ROSEN: A Hidden History of the Imperial Presidency

THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

THANK YOU FOR HOT-AIRING

I HAVE BEEN READING *THE NEW REPUBLIC* for roughly four years. Though I would describe myself as a conservative Republican, TNR is the only weekly I take. I agree more with the conclusions of *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review*, but I find the quality of insight, observation, and reasoning in these pages superior. Which is why I was so disturbed by Lee Siegel's article on Oprah Winfrey ("Thank You For Sharing," June 5 & 12). Nothing short of "miserable" describes this article's perfect storm of postmodern jargon, gaudy sophistication, and vapid analysis. What made this article such a shameful departure from the magazine's characteristic excellence was not what it said but how it said it. Siegel's points were ordinary and conceptually simple: Oprah is a modern-day Horatio Alger whose signature themes are empathy, hope, infinite possibility, and second chances. What, then, is the need for language like "cunningly orchestrated subtext of racial catharses" or "possibly habitable phases in the spectrum of exchangeability" or "the oceanic melting of the ego in high feeling"? Herbert Croly is rolling over in his grave.

STEPHEN EIDE
Brighton, Massachusetts

LEE SIEGEL RESPONDS:
Well, old HC has probably performed several hundred triple gainers since he died in 1930. Actually, I wrote that Oprah's story had *replaced* Horatio Alger's as the archetypal American rags-to-riches tale, and I explained why. I concluded by saying that she had "made it virtuous to be amoral." As for Stephen Eide's trouble with my gaudy, vapid, sophisticated, postmodern way of writing, I suggest that he restore the fragments of my sentences to their original context and once again put his shoulder to the wheel.

BACK STORY

IN HIS REVIEW OF THE MOVIE OF *THE Da Vinci Code*, Stanley Kauffmann rightly observes that "the attribution of common mortality to Jesus is not new," but he suggests that it dates only to 1960 ("Divining Divinity," June 19). Socianism, a sixteenth-century sect, asserted

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THE GENIUS OF OPRAH
By Lee Siegel

something similar, and the Ebionites, a bridge group between Jews and Christians that may have hung on until the twelfth century, did not believe in the divinity of Jesus. Controversies about the nature of Jesus arose soon after his death and threatened to tear Christianity apart, until the First Council of Nicaea in the fourth century decided that Jesus was divine and that anyone who denied this was a heretic. The unfortunate thing about the movie is that there is an important historical and theological issue buried in its appallingly bad story.

ROBERTA KALECHOFSKY
Marblehead, Massachusetts

I HAVEN'T READ *THE DA VINCI CODE*. After reading Kauffmann's review, I probably won't see the movie. But I wonder about his logic. Kauffmann says that he hasn't read the book, and he gives a plausible reason that he (and presumably many others) found it easier to watch the film. Just a few paragraphs later, he reveals the movie's ending. He explains that he "can't really spoil the ending," because so many people have read the book. Am I the only one who finds these positions in a certain amount of obvious intellectual tension?

DAVID C. SOBELSOHN
Washington, D.C.

STANLEY KAUFFMANN RESPONDS:
The intellectual tension that is obvious to David C. Sobelsohn isn't obvious to me. Maybe I'm too tense.

DARK ART

IF PETER BEINART SEES THE REemergence of a split between optimistic and dark conservatism ("Nighthawks," June 5 & 12), David Rieff's article against intervention in Darfur seems to highlight a split between idealistic liberalism and a darker one that is dismissive of the victimized—an attitude that I thought was conservative territory ("Moral Blindness," June 5 & 12). Rieff's only goals seem to be not to further infuriate Islamic fascists and Arab racists—already infuriated by the existence of other religions and other people not like themselves—and to desert those they attack. To that end, it's not enough for him to invoke realpolitik in order to duck intervention. Rieff actually accuses the Darfuris of having a political agenda, as if the desire to escape murder and systematic, targeted ethnic cleansing were on the same order as Alaska's Bridge to Nowhere or some other form of pork-barrel patronage. It's little more than a transparent attempt to dirty up and dismiss the Darfuris as a prelude and excuse for the abandonment that seems to be Rieff's goal. He then turns the core liberal value of human rights on its head, dismissively calling it "human rightsism," which he proceeds to speak of in the

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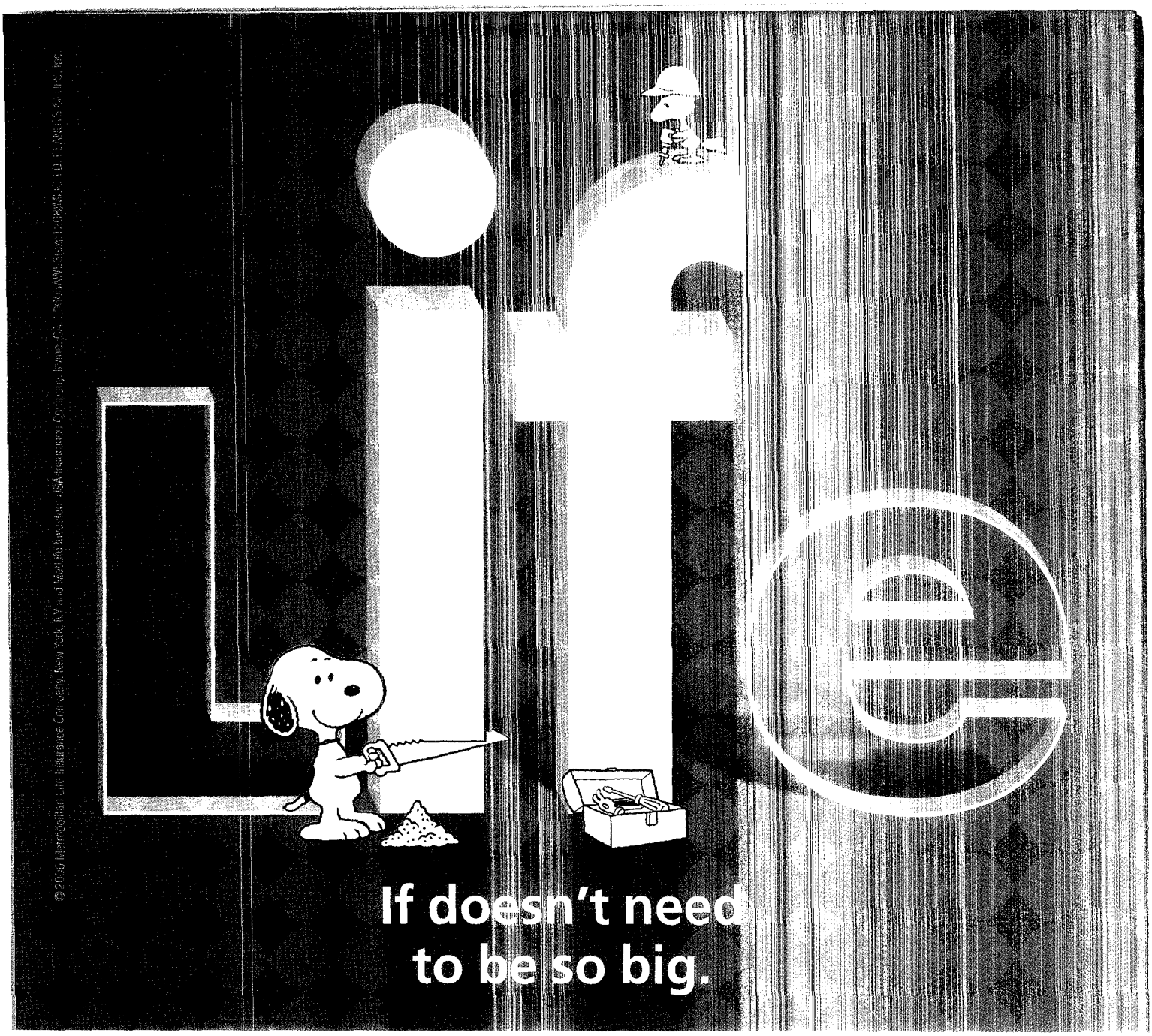

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Judge Knot

TRB
FROM WASHINGTON

LAST WEEK, THE NEW YORK Court of Appeals handed down a lousy decision on gay marriage. And thank goodness it did. By refusing—on flimsy grounds—to strike down the Empire State's gay marriage ban, the court actually did the gay marriage movement a favor. Gay marriage is coming in America—through the democratic process. If the courts step in, they will only set the effort back.

The court held that the New York legislature could ban gay marriage because it could rationally believe that children are better served by a father and mother than by two parents of the same sex. That belief, it acknowledged, was not based on empirical evidence. But, even if it were, the court's argument would still have made no sense. Banning gay marriage doesn't increase the chances that children will be raised by a mother and father, unless you believe that allowing gays to wed will convince straights not to. And the court cited no evidence that it would.

But, for the gay marriage movement, the court's bad logic may actually prove good news. The public is growing more and more supportive of full equality for gays and lesbians. In 1996, according to the Pew Research Center, 65 percent of Americans opposed gay marriage, with only 27 percent in favor. When Pew asked the same question this March, only 51 percent were opposed, with 39 percent in favor. And, among Americans under 30, gay marriage has majority support. In fact, according to a *Los Angeles Times* poll, more than 70 percent of young people consider gay marriage inevitable.

But the Pew poll also contained a warning. Between July 2003 and February 2004, opposition to gay marriage substantially *increased*—largely as a backlash against the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court's decision to mandate it. During the 2004 campaign, President Bush and his minions didn't just attack gay marriage per se; they attacked the "activist, unelected judges" who had imposed it. From Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s to Richard Nixon in the early '70s to Bill O'Reilly today, conservatives do best when they play the role of populists, attacking arrogant liberal elites who think Joe Six Pack is an ignorant bigot. The Massachusetts decision played perfectly into their hands.

In the last two years, however, as memories of the Massachusetts decision have receded—and other states have not followed suit—the conservative argument has lost traction. The percentage of Americans who consider themselves "strongly" opposed to gay marriage dropped from 42 percent in February 2004 to only 28 percent this March. And the gay marriage movement has begun to win legislative victories. In 2005, California's state legislature became the first in the nation to approve gay marriage. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed the bill, noting that, in 2000, 61 percent of Californians had rejected gay marriage in a referendum. What he didn't note was that, by 2005, according to the nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California, state opinion had shifted—with as many likely Golden State voters supporting gay marriage as opposing it. In New Jersey and much of New England as well, gay marriage now enjoys close to majority support. In New York, gubernatorial front-runner Eliot Spitzer wants to enact it through the democratic process, as does New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg. And, when the U.S. Senate tried to pass a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in June, it received only 49 votes—with two Northeastern Republicans, Pennsylvania's Arlen Specter and New Hampshire's Judd Gregg (who had supported the amendment two years earlier), reversing positions and voting no.

A comparison with the civil rights movement suggests even greater reason for optimism. First, although less numerous, gay Americans are wealthier and more politically influential than were African Americans in the '50s and '60s. And, partly as a result of that economic and political clout, they have had considerable success in winning corporate America to their side. (In Massachusetts, 165 prominent business and civic leaders just signed a statement supporting marriage equality.) The result is that the gay rights movement punches above its weight. It is more politically articulate than the opposition, and thus, if public opinion is roughly split, it will win more often than it loses. That is particularly true when anti-gay-marriage sentiment is tepid, which, in the absence of court decisions, it often is.

Secondly, the gay rights movement is less threatening to straights than the civil rights movement was to whites. Whites grew less racist in the '50s and '60s, but the urban riots and escalating crime of the late '60s and '70s prompted a backlash—as many working-class whites decided that blacks were not victims but victimizers. Furthermore, once the civil rights movement achieved legal integration and voting rights, it embraced an economic agenda that required some redistribution of white wealth. That exacerbated the backlash, especially as blue-collar whites saw their incomes stagnate in the '70s.

With gay marriage, by contrast, the trend toward greater public acceptance is likely to continue unabated. Gays aren't asking anything economically from the straight majority. And, by embracing gay marriage, they have actually become less culturally threatening. If some civil rights activists moved from racial integration to racial separatism in the late '60s (and thus convinced many whites that blacks didn't want to join the cultural mainstream), gay activists have largely done the opposite—moving from separatism to integration. Once largely indifferent—if not hostile—to marriage, most gay activists now make it their top priority. Gays don't want to overthrow society's most hallowed institution; they want in.

It is easy to see why gay and lesbian couples want the benefits and dignity of marriage now, rather than waiting years and perhaps decades for the political process to run its course. But, in politics, pragmatism can be a moral obligation. Gay marriage can be truly secured only by changing Americans' minds, and court decisions that lack public support do not accelerate that process; they sabotage it. With its shoddy reasoning, the New York Court of Appeals last week helped the gay marriage struggle in the best way it could—it got out of the way.

PETER BEINART

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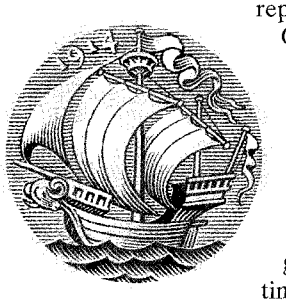
Attacked

THERE ARE CRISES that complicate and crises that clarify. The crisis along Israel's southern and northern frontiers is of the latter sort. Hamas and Hezbollah, in accordance with their lunatic assumption that the worse, the better, crossed an internationally recognized border and killed and have taken hostage soldiers of the neighboring state whose existence they despise. The attacks were unprovoked, except by the attackers' view of the world. Israel has rightly chosen to regard these provocations very seriously, and so far it has earned the sympathy of decent observers everywhere.

What has been clarified by this round of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, first and foremost, the character of Israel's adversaries. They are Islamist terrorists, and proud to be so. More ominously, they are Islamist terrorists come to power. Hamas is no longer only a movement; it is now also a government. In the months since Hamas was elected by the Palestinians to govern (or misgovern) them, the regime of Ismail Haniyeh and company has presided over the launching of hundreds of Qassam rockets into Israel, applauded a suicide bombing at a Tel Aviv restaurant (it would have been hypocritical of them not to applaud it!), allowed an unprecedented escalation of the conflict with the firing of a souped-up rocket into Ashkelon—the first time such a strike has been made against a major Israeli city—and, of course, kidnapped Corporal Gilad Shalit. All of this, again, is the work of a *government*. When Hamas was elected, there was an eruption of assurances in the media that power will breed responsibility, that the drudgeries of governing will usurp the ecstasies of bombing, and so on. "HAMAS?" the headline on the cover of *The New York Review of Books* asked hopefully. But the Hamas rulers of Palestine have made it plain that they see no contradiction between governing and bombing. Success at the ballot box has had no calming effect. It has merely conferred political legitimacy upon moral depravity.

Hezbollah, of course, is not a government, but it is a part of a government. Its freedom of action, its unreconstructed radicalism, its pervasive presence in Lebanese politics: All this brings to mind nasty memories of a few decades ago, so that it is not incorrect to say that, over the last 30 years, Lebanon has exchanged a PLO mini-state within its borders for a Hezbollah mini-state within its borders. When Shalit was kidnapped, Hamas cited the precedent of Hezbollah's kidnappings (and prisoner-exchanges) in the past, as if in exoneration of its own extortion. Hezbollah has always been Hamas's teacher in the great *madrassa* of anti-Israeli terrorism. Now the teacher has taken a cue from the student and taken its own Israeli hostages. Israel must now remind its adversaries that it was deadly in earnest when, decades ago, it proclaimed that it would tolerate no such aggression along its northern border.



There is also a larger strategic dimension to the Hamas-Hezbollah offensive. These provocations stink of Assad and Ahmadinejad. The Hamas action in Gaza appears to have been ordered by Khaled Meshal, the Hamas leader who resides in Damascus—which is to say, it is also a piece of Syrian intrigue. Nor can anything of significance take place in Lebanon without the sanction of Damascus; and Hezbollah enjoys not only the toleration of Syria but also the time-honored support of Iran, which is also Syria's great ally in a region that may be otherwise turning in a better direction. Perhaps Meshal's responsibility for the Gaza attack will now allow Haniyeh to masquerade as a moderate. (*The Washington Post* this week published an op-ed by Haniyeh that was full of outrageous assertions. It seems that an election is all that stands between terrorism and punditry.)

It is also worth noting that the Hamas-Hezbollah aggression is aimed at damaging precisely those political forces in Israel—now represented by Ehud Olmert's government—that withdrew Israeli settlers from Gaza and is committed to withdrawing Israeli settlers (70,000 of them) from the West Bank. It was one of the great ironies of recent times that Olmert's party rose in Israel at the exact moment that Hamas rose in Palestine; but the irony has turned deadly. They, the Palestinians, really do want everything. And so they are about to learn, yet again, that, as long as they want everything, they will get nothing. This may satisfy the nihilists in charge, since nihilists live for nothing. ■

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Bush's Leviathan state.

Power of One

BY JEFFREY ROSEN

ONE OF THE defining principles of the Bush administration has been a belief in unfettered executive power. Indeed, President Bush has taken the principle to such unprecedented extremes that an ironic reversal has taken place: A conservative ideology that had always been devoted to limiting government power has been transformed into the largest expansion of executive power since FDR. Often criticized as mere political opportunism—a cynical rationale devised after September 11 to allow the president to do whatever he likes in the war on terrorism—Bush's embrace of the "unitary executive" is in fact the culmination of an internal debate among conservatives that dates back to the Reagan administration. The initial idea—born out of efforts in the 1980s to limit government expansion—was that a strong dose of presidential power was necessary to constrain the burgeoning federal power of Congress. But, with Bush's excesses, conservatives are reaping the consequences of the Leviathan state that they once warned against: Once executive power is viewed as absolute, centralized, and indivisible, it tends inevitably to grow.

The White House's vision of an unfettered presidency was dealt a crucial blow at the end of June with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Hamdan* v. *Rumsfeld*. But, although the administration lost, one could trace in the justices' opinions the evolution of conservative thought on executive power over the past few decades. Concurring with the majority, Anthony Kennedy wrote that the administration's use of military tribunals in the war on terrorism "is not a case ... where the Executive can assert some unilateral authority to fill a void left by congressional inaction. It is a case where Congress, in the proper exercise of its powers as an independent branch of government ... has ... set limits on the President's authority." Clarence Thomas, joined by Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito, filed an emotional dissent, calling the idea that Congress could second-guess the president's authority as commander-in-chief "antithetical to our constitutional structure."

The generational divide is telling: Kennedy represents an older wave of conservatives who never served in the executive branch and who associate the presidency with the liberal nationalizing excesses of the New Deal and the Great Society. By contrast, the unitary executive proponents—Thomas, Scalia, Alito, and possibly Chief Justice John Roberts (who recused himself from the Supreme Court case, because he had ruled against Hamdan on the D.C. Circuit)—all served in the Ford or Reagan administrations. And, during that time, all came to see a strong presidency as the only way to defend conservative ideals from the encroachments of a Democratic Congress, liberal courts, and obstreperous bureaucrats. "Conservatives who came of age in the '70s and '80s viewed the presidency as a friendly institution," explains Steven Calabresi, who founded the Federalist Society and went on to serve as special assistant to Attorney General Ed Meese and teach law at Northwestern University, "while those who came of age in the '50s"—such as William Rehnquist "viewed it as harmful."

THE CRUCIBLE IN which the unitary executive theory was forged was the Reagan-era Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) at the Justice Department. During the Reagan years, the OLC--which provides legal advice to the president about the limits of his powers—became known as a center of conservative intellectual thought, and as such attracted lots of bright, young, true believers. Having grown up in the shadow of the New Left, they had a more combative view of politics than some of their elders, and that combativeness led to the idea that the only way to tame federal power was with a strong dose of federal power. Under the leadership of Ted Olson and Charles Cooper, with the help of deputies like Alito, the OLC vigorously asserted the constitutional powers of the unitary executive. As Calabresi recalls, " 'Unitary executive' was a phrase that was commonplace around the Justice Department when I was working there, although I was the first to defend it in a law review article in 1992. The inspiration for the phrase was Alexander Hamilton's call for 'unity' in the executive."

The initial purpose of the unitary executive theory was to strike a blow at the heart of the regulatory state. The idea was that the president needed complete control over the executive branch; therefore, he needed the power to fire executive officials—including the independent counsel and the heads of independent agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission—who didn't share his vision. While Reagan did not launch a full-out assault on the regulatory agencies, as some conservatives had hoped he would, he did issue an executive order requiring the Office of Management and Budget to review a cost-benefit analysis before any major regulation could go into effect. As Alito recalled in a speech to the Federalist Society in 2000, when he was at the OLC in the 1980s, "We were strong proponents of the theory of the unitary executive, that all federal executive power is vested by the Constitution in the president. And I thought then, and I still think, that this theory best captures the meaning of the Constitution's text and structure." The effort to shore up presidential authority pervaded the Reagan Justice Department. Though he never worked at the OLC, Calabresi came up with the idea of using presidential "signing statements" as a way to record the president's interpretation of laws to ensure that they didn't infringe on his constitutional prerogatives.

"I think a great deal of it was a response to the fact that

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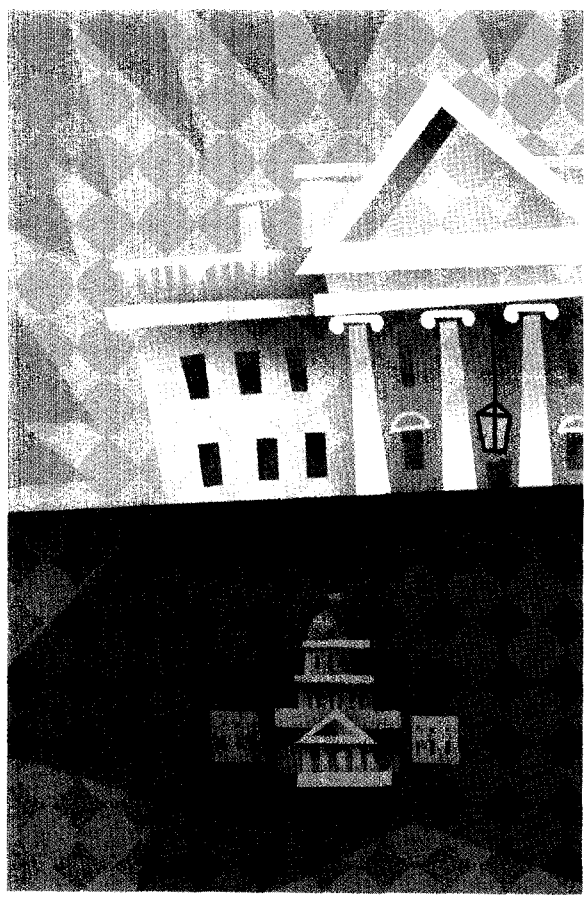
Congress was in Democratic hands," says Terry Eastland, whose 1992 book, *Energy in the Executive: The Case for the Strong Presidency*, remains the best intellectual history of the conservative embrace of executive power. "There were conservative instrumentalists who wanted to assert executive power because they hated Congress—although they would become very pro-Congress when they had Clinton in the White House." In his book, Eastland, now the publisher of *The Weekly Standard*, tried to move beyond this political opportunism, arguing that conservatives erred in shunning Hamilton's original vision that a strong executive was necessary to tame legislative excesses. Like Hamilton, Eastland argues that the president should vigorously use the veto power to defend his office against congressional attacks. "I was trying to interest conservatives in the argument that, if limited government is your goal, you need a strong presidency to effect that end," Eastland says. "If you have a presidency that's simply passive, given the inertial tendencies of Washington, the central government will only grow." Eastland was director of public affairs in the Reagan Justice Department, and, in his book, he drew on ideas that had percolated in the department throughout his tenure. Other conservative thinkers were coming to similar conclusions about executive power at the time as well. In 1988, the American Enterprise Institute held a conference on "The Fettered Presidency," later published as a book that began: "The office of the president of the United States has been significantly weakened in recent years and ... Congress is largely, but not entirely, responsible."

That same year, the Supreme Court rejected the Reagan administration's claim that the independent counsel law was unconstitutional—by a decisive 7–1 vote. (The decision was written by Rehnquist, who came of age in the '50s hating the centralizing excesses of FDR; the only dissenter was Scalia, a former head of the OLC under President Ford.) Nevertheless, when Bill Clinton took office, his Justice Department did not entirely reject the broad vision of executive power asserted by Reagan and the first President Bush. During the '90s, the OLC was relatively cautious in its assertion of executive power, with a little more respect for congressional prerogatives, but it still mostly embraced the Reagan and Bush administrations' views of the unitary executive. "I strongly upheld executive power and handed it on largely intact," recalls Walter Dellinger, who took over the OLC in 1993. In particular, Dellinger recalls, he opposed "many proposals that emanated from the Clinton White House that would have been harmful to the executive. One said a president couldn't propose a treaty unless he'd had an environmental impact statement and waited 60 days. I went ballistic." Dellinger wrote important OLC opinions defending the authority of the president to decline to enforce laws he believes are unconstitutional. And his successor, Randy Moss, defended Clinton's right to send troops to Kosovo without explicit authorization from Congress. "There's nothing wrong with the phrase 'unitary executive,'" Dellinger tells me. "What's wrong is the way the second Bush administration interpreted the phrase." Dellinger agrees that the president has "inherent authority in the absence of any congressional legislation. ... Their view is that, whatever the president has inherent authority to do, Congress can't override it."



DAVID COWLES

HOW DID THE idea of the unitary executive morph from a defense of the president's ability to control the administrative state to an assertion of unchecked presidential power during wartime? Credit the evolution to Dick Cheney, whose suspicion of Congress predates even the Reagan-era attorneys who developed the unitary executive theory. In the mid-'70s, young conservatives working in the Ford administration—including not only Cheney, then chief of staff, but also Scalia at the OLC—felt besieged by the post-Watergate laws that Congress had passed to restrain the president, in particular the War Powers Resolution, which requires the president to withdraw troops if Congress hasn't passed a resolution authorizing them within 60 days. When Congress voted to cut off funding in South Vietnam in 1975, they felt it had undermined Ford's foreign policy and usurped power from the executive branch.

When Cheney went on to serve as a Republican congressman from Wyoming in the '80s, the Iran-Contra scandal only reinforced his view that presidential power needed to be defended. Cheney commissioned the minority report to the Iran-Contra hearings—drafted with the help of a young aide named David Addington—arguing that most

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of what Reagan had done was legal. As Jane Mayer noted recently in *The New Yorker*, Cheney cited the Iran-Contra minority report and the legal limitations of the post-Watergate era as a threat to Hamilton's vision of executive power. "I believe in a strong, robust executive authority," he declared, "and I think the world we live in demands it."

When George W. Bush took office in 2000, the various threads of pro-executive power conservatism—the Watergate-scarred Ford veterans, the Reagan OLC team—united with younger members of the Bush OLC to embrace aggressively the idea of the unitary executive. With Cheney's encouragement, Addington (his longtime legal adviser) combs legislation in search of infringements on the president's power. As *The Wall Street Journal* reported in January, Bush used the phrase "unitary executive" in 110 signing statements and other executive documents between 2001 and 2005, compared with Reagan (one), George H.W. Bush (six), and Clinton (zero).

The Bush administration's most dramatic expansion of the unitary executive theory came in memos drafted by Addington and John Yoo at the OLC concerning the war on terrorism. An OLC memo drafted by Yoo two weeks after the September 11 attacks insisted the president, rather than Congress, had "plenary constitutional power to take such military actions as he deems necessary and appropriate to respond to the terrorist attacks upon the United States on September 11, 2001." Another memo, influenced by Addington, claimed that there were essentially no legal limits on the CIA's treatment of foreign prisoners held outside the United States.

Yoo's initial view that the president could use force abroad without congressional authorization was not especially radical: It stemmed from a scholarly article he had written in 1996, expanded last year into a book called *The Powers of War and Peace*. In the book and article, he argued that, although the president doesn't need Congress's approval to send troops, Congress can control the president by cutting off funds for wars of which it disapproves. But the OLC memos and executive orders defending torture, warrantless wiretaps, indefinite detention, military tribunals, and those insisting the Geneva conventions do not apply to the war on terrorism went much further: They argued that Congress can't control the president in the war on terrorism, even if it wants to. In a forthcoming book, *War by Other Means*, Yoo defends the president's ability to interpret (critics would say ignore) federal laws in the war on terrorism so they are consistent with his vision of his constitutional authority. "Throughout much of the war on terrorism after 9/11, President Bush has said to Congress, 'I don't require or need detailed statutory authorization for some things.' His power as commander-in-chief already gives him that authority," Yoo tells me. He argues, for example, that the president can conduct surveillance without using the procedures mandated by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act based on his constitutional authority as commander-in-chief. "When wars occurred abroad, no one raised problems about the president conducting surveillance abroad," Yoo tells me. "Because 9/11 is a war occurring just as much here as abroad, that means we have this push to have presidential power exercised at home that's different from the previous American experience."

But, according to Democratic and Republican critics, Yoo has converted the president's authority to act unilaterally in the face of congressional *silence* into the authority to act unilaterally in the face of congressional *opposition*. "There is a strain of legal reasoning in this administration that believes, in a time of war, the other two branches have a diminished role or no role," Republican Senator Lindsey Graham declared after the *Hamdan* decision. As Dellinger tells me, "They conflate what the world was like before Congress has acted" with the one after Congress has made its views clear.

In the Supreme Court's *Hamdan* ruling, Stevens's majority opinion explicitly rejected the Bush administration's most extreme view of executive unilateralism. Citing Justice Robert Jackson's famous opinion striking down President Truman's effort to seize the steel mills in 1952, John Paul Stevens declared, "Whether or not the President has independent power, absent congressional authorization, to convene military commissions, he may not disregard limitations that Congress has, in proper exercise of its own war powers, placed on his powers." Stevens added, "The Government does not argue otherwise." (In fact, in an earlier hearing before the appellate court, the government *did* argue otherwise, asserting the president's power to ignore unambiguous congressional limitations or to stretch ambiguous congressional authorizations beyond the point of plausibility.)

Hamdan was an example of the Court doing what it does best: not imposing a contested constitutional vision of its own, but forcing the president and Congress to define a shared constitutional vision by working together. If anything, Bush's radical unilateralism may have provoked the Court to overreact. In *Hamdan*, the Court did not merely hold that the administration needed to get Congress's approval to set up military commissions. It also held that any commissions established by the president had to comply with the Geneva conventions. According to Jack Goldsmith, former head of the OLC under Bush, "The argument that the Geneva conventions apply to transnational terrorists in wartime contradicts 50 years of executive branch understandings." In their eagerness to repudiate Yoo's vision of the unitary executive, in other words, the justices have constrained the executive branch even more tightly than it was constrained before. In this sense, Bush's extremism may have ultimately weakened executive power in the same way Clinton did when the Supreme Court rejected his sweeping assertions of executive privilege in the Monica Lewinsky investigation. By taking implausibly aggressive positions before the Supreme Court, both presidents precipitated a judicial backlash that left their own authority diminished. And that may be the ultimate irony that both sides failed to anticipate. ■

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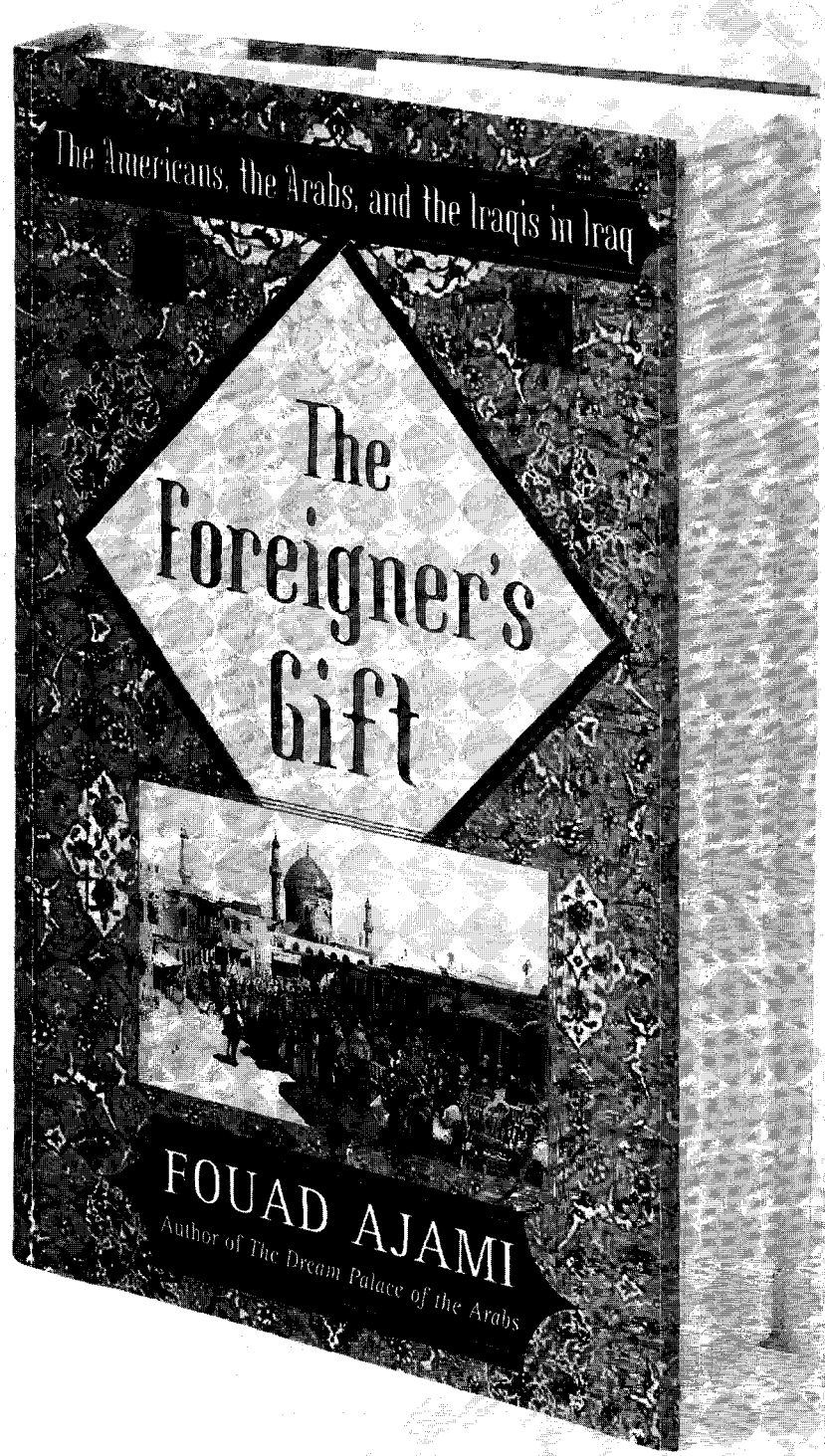

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Ban Don Yang Postcard
Stranded

BY ANNA HUSARSKA

BAN DON YANG CAMP, THAILAND

THEY HAD ALREADY sold or given away their mosquito nets and rice rations when the bad news arrived. It was late September 2005 in the Ban Don Yang refugee camp, located on Thailand's western border and home to thousands of ethnic Karen refugees fleeing Burma's brutal military dictatorship. Among those refugees were 25 who had been slated for resettlement in the United States. One, a chubby, white-haired farmer, was bound for Utica, New York, where he hoped to seek medical attention for his half-paralyzed 18-year-old daughter. Another, a baby-faced 28-year-old, was planning to reunite with his mother, father, brother, and sister in Amarillo, Texas; he had not seen them in six years, since taking up arms to fight with a Burmese opposition group. Then there was a rice-picker who had served time in a notorious Burmese jail. For once, his future looked bright: His five-year-old son was going to grow up an American.

Or so he believed. Two days before they were scheduled to fly out, the 25 refugees, all of whom had been previously approved by U.S. immigration authorities, were suddenly and without explanation removed from the resettlement list—or, as they put in their tentative English, "ejected." They tried to figure out what had happened, but answers were hard to come by. "Then we heard on the BBC in Burmese that the U.S. would not accept anyone who has been a fighter," recalled the rice-picker. But this created more questions than it answered. For one thing, some of the 25 refugees were *not* fighters. Moreover, as the rice-picker pointed out, "We all know other Burmese who have been fighters and who were resettled." Why was there a problem now?

The answer has little to do with them and everything to do with the United States. A series of congressional actions before and after September 11—including the Patriot Act—have created a quandary for many refugees seeking to enter the country. The problem has two parts. First, anyone who has provided "material support" to a terrorist group can be denied entry into the United States. The concept of "material support" has neither a clear *de minimis* level nor an explicit exemption for those who have been coerced—so a farmer who, under duress, provides a bowl of rice to a terrorist can be barred from resettling in the United States. Compounding this situation is the irrationally broad definition of terrorism put forth by Congress. Since passage of the Patriot Act, a "terrorist organization" can be any "group of two or more individuals, whether organized or not," that uses an "explosive, firearm, or other weapon or dangerous device (other than for mere personal monetary gain), with intent to endanger, directly or indirectly, the safety of one or more individuals or to cause substantial damage to property." In other words, just about any kind of violence can qualify as terrorism—even when it is a struggle that advances democracy and even when it is being carried out in opposition to unjust regimes. What's more, anyone who gives "material support," however minimal, to such groups is ineligible for refugee status.

This was exactly the situation of the 25 Karen Burmese in Ban Don Yang camp. At most, these refugees were guilty of legitimate resistance to one of the world's nastiest dictatorships. But some had only the most tangential of associations with rebel forces. When I asked the white-haired farmer if he had ever carried a gun, he seemed embarrassed to admit he never had. A tailor insisted he had taught sewing classes for the separatist Karen National Union (KNU), but it turned out that, far from fashioning military fatigues, he was merely making Karen folk clothes. When pressed, he finally conceded, "I lived in the area under control of the KNU's fourth brigade, so I said [during my resettlement interview] that I was part of the fourth brigade of the KNU." For many Karen, ethnic pride dictates that they reflexively inflate their ties to the armed opposition. Besides, many civilians living in the Karen region of Burma own some sort of connection, however tenuous, to rebel fighters. That is simply how life unfolds if you are part of a marginalized community in a totalitarian outpost. And therein lies the cruel logic of America's new approach to refugees: The very circumstance that causes someone to become a refugee in the first place—namely, persecution by an oppressive government—will get you "ejected" from resettlement in the United States. This would be a sad state of affairs if it were happening only to a small group of people in a forgotten corner of Southeast Asia. In fact, it is happening all over the world.

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, the number of refugees admitted to the United States plummeted—from 70,000 in fiscal year 2001, which ended just 20 days after the attacks, to 27,000 in 2002 and 28,000 in 2003. Admissions have picked up since, rebounding to 53,000 in 2004 and 54,000 in 2005, but they have yet to return to previous levels. This year, the International Rescue Committee (IRC)—where I am senior policy adviser, and on whose behalf I traveled to Thailand—projects that the United States will take, at most, 40,000 refugees, an improvement over 2002 and 2003—but still well short of the up to 70,000 it had offered to accept.

Anna Husarska is senior policy adviser at the International Rescue Committee.

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That means stranding tens of thousands of refugees in places like Ban Don Yang. Indeed, for fiscal year 2006, the United States proposed resettling thousands of Burmese refugees, the bulk of which (more than 9,000) live in one camp in Thailand called Tham Hin. Yet, to date, the monthly influx of Burmese has been mostly a trickle—five in January, 86 in February, seven in March, 30 in April, and so on. Even members of the administration acknowledge the problem. Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey recently told the Heritage Foundation that "many [refugees] are now being disqualified because of their resistance activities to oppressive governments or because they have been coerced to provide 'material support' to their persecutors."

This isn't only a problem for Burmese refugees. Among those who have been blocked from entering the country are Cubans who supported anti-Castro forces in the 1960s and a group of Vietnamese Montagnards—staunch allies of the United States during the Vietnam war—who are now living in Cambodia. Then there is Colombia. The IRC first observed a drop in the number of refugees admitted from the war-torn country in 2004: That year, the United States accepted just 577 Colombians for resettlement, less than half the number it had planned to take (and only a fraction of the 258,000 Colombian refugees awaiting resettlement). Why? Because, according to the State Department, "Many Colombian refugee applicants have made payments or provided other forms of assistance to armed guerilla or paramilitary groups as a form of protection tax or 'vacuna,' often made under the threat of harm to themselves or their families." Some individual stories border on the absurd. For example, after guerrillas took livestock as war tax from a family, raped two sisters, and killed the husband of one, the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referred the two women, who were temporarily in Ecuador, to Canada for resettlement—because UNHCR said "items (e.g. farm animals) provided under duress are still deemed to be material support under U.S. law."

Episodes like these make a mockery of America's tradition of serving as a refuge for the persecuted. But the problems go beyond that. At the most basic level, victims of persecution are left stranded in squalid camps, unable to move on with their lives. And, should other Western governments ever decide to emulate Washington's paranoid approach, it could become more and more difficult to find homes for targets of political, ethnic, or religious repression. Moreover, the message to victims of genocide and ethnic cleansing is that, if they choose to defend themselves, they are damaging their future resettlement opportunities. In addition, lumping opponents of dictatorships with terrorists provides a valuable propaganda victory to oppressive regimes. Finally, one imagines that, in the future, foreign groups like the Montagnards in Vietnam will think twice before taking up arms on behalf of the United States. That has unfortunate strategic implications, since we often need these groups as much as they need us—think of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. When President Bush, speaking directly to the citizens of undemocratic countries, said during his second inauguration that, "when you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you," this bizarre situation could not have been what he had in mind.

AND IT ISN'T likely to get better anytime soon. In May, a bipartisan group of senators, led by Patrick Leahy and Norm Coleman, proposed requiring the secretary of state to determine which groups are actually terrorist in nature and to create exceptions for those individuals who pose no threat to national security. The idea was to ensure that freedom fighters, American allies, and innocent victims would no longer be punished by the system. Leahy cut to the heart of the matter: "A 13-year-old girl is kidnapped, she is forced to become a member of the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, become a soldier, basically a sex slave of one of the commanders. She is ineligible for admission as a refugee under current law. That is wrong. In fact, this is immoral." But 79 senators were unmoved by Leahy's logic, and the proposal was overwhelmingly voted down.

Meanwhile, the Bush administration, under a barrage of criticism from editorial pages of major U.S. newspapers, most notably *The Washington Post*, agreed in May to a waiver that lifted the material support bar for the more than 9,000 Karen Burmese living in Tham Hin. Interviews are currently underway in the camp, and, if a decent percentage of refugees are approved, America's overall resettlement numbers for 2006 will look better as a result. (It remains to be seen how many will actually get in.) Still, issuing case-by-case waivers is no way to fix a fundamentally broken system.

Nor does it provide much solace to the residents of Ban Don Yang. Their camp was not granted a waiver, and so they are still in limbo—expelled from their homeland, squatting in a country that does not want them, waiting for word from across the Pacific. Several months after their departure for the United States was abruptly canceled, another refugee, a teacher who was scheduled to resettle soon in Norway, offered to help. He sat down at a beat-up typewriter and assisted the families in composing a letter to the American ambassador in Bangkok. Referring to themselves in wobbly English as "People of Concerns" or "POCs," they wrote: "We would like to know you the matter and all of the ejected POCs are in physical debility as a result of mental stress and strain living in limited compound. It will be the most appropriate for us if your honourable could contribute a move to solve our problem as soon as possible. We all ejected POCs sincerely hope, you will kindly consider on the matter and generous enough to accept our humble request and seriously consider in time." That was six months ago. They are still waiting for a reply. ■

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The Kurds' cunning plan.

Good Actors

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

ERBIL, IRAQ

ON THE HIGHWAY leading out of Erbil, the capital city of Iraqi Kurdistan, the only place to eat before reaching the city of Kirkuk is the Kurdistan Restaurant. The low-slung cinderblock building is in the Baghdad-controlled governorate of Tameem, but you wouldn't know it from the image on the restaurant's façade. Superimposed against the red, yellow, and green colors of the Kurdish flag is an impressive map of Greater Kurdistan, the ideational Kurdish homeland stretching from southern Turkey to western Iran.

That such a map appears just outside of Kirkuk is no coincidence. Kirkuk, which Kurds call their Jerusalem, is a fundamental component of the dream of Greater Kurdistan. Every Kurd can recite the story of how Iraq's Arabs stole the city from them. Located about 150 miles northeast of Baghdad, Kirkuk had never been of great historic or political significance. But, in 1927, a consortium of oil prospectors headed by Calouste Gulbenkian, the legendary Armenian oil magnate, discovered that the city was afloat some of the richest oil fields on the planet. The then-fledgling Iraqi government started exerting control over Kirkuk, moving Kurds out and Arabs loyal to Baghdad's Hashemite monarchy in. For nearly 80 years, the city has been a symbol of the Kurds' fragmented and oppressed status. With Saddam Hussein gone and Iraq's Arabs mired in sectarian disarray, they intend to take it back.

The reconquest of Kirkuk has begun not with an army but with a creeping of Kurdish settlers along the highway south from Erbil. Before Saddam was ousted in 2003, the Iraqi army prevented Kurds from living south of the Qushtapa checkpoint, just a few miles outside Erbil. As soon as the Iraqi army abandoned its positions during the U.S.-led invasion, however, defiant Kurdish civilians immediately occupied the barracks to mark their new frontiers. Over the last three years, they have pushed closer and closer to Kirkuk. Crumbling stone structures along the road have become new Kurdish villages, displaying red, yellow, and green flags. And, in the northernmost sector of Kirkuk itself, just beyond where plumes of fire illuminate some of the world's richest oil fields, the first outpost isn't an Arab area, but rather the Kurdish neighborhood of Rahimawa.

What the highway from Erbil to Kirkuk reveals is that, for three years, while Sunni and Shia Arabs have bitterly fought one another—and the U.S. occupation—the Kurds have methodically established a presence on the ground. Any *peshmerga*—guerrillas who serve as Kurdistan's army—who travel south to take Kirkuk will be treated as heroes along the road. Any Iraqi soldiers who travel north to retain it will have to subdue a hostile population.

There would seem to be few better moments for the *peshmerga* caravans to fly down the Erbil-Kirkuk highway. This week's orgy of violence—in which Sunnis bombed Shia shrines and Shia militiamen pulled Sunnis out of their homes for execution in broad daylight—underscores how Iraq is at a point of permanent sectarian emergency. But the independence of Kurdistan is not imminent. After the attack on the Askariya shrine in February, instead of exploiting increased sectarian tensions, Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the president of Iraq, worked energetically to restart talks between Sunni and Shia leaders. Indeed, at every turn, the Kurds have opted not to declare independence but to keep the country united. "It's ironic," wrote Turkish columnist Cengiz Candar, "that Talabani ... long considered a secessionist, is now functioning as the glue most likely to make Iraq stick together and to prevent it from breaking apart."

But Talabani's efforts aren't ironic. They're strategic. The current generation of Kurdish leaders has reached a consensus about Kurdistan's future: For the next several years, the Kurds must remain part of Iraq if they are to achieve statehood. That's because they need to convince Iraqis, often-hostile neighbors like Turkey, and foreign powers like the United States that Kurdish independence is a positive—or at least nonthreatening—development. The timetable for independence varies: Some Kurdish leaders suggest independence is only a few years away, while others see it in a decade or even a generation. The most important factor in winning recognition, however, will be the visible and consistent demonstration that they paid, in the words of one Kurdish leader, "more than our fair share" for building Iraq.

But, in order to have a shot at independence, the Kurds must also set up an economic and political infrastructure that will make their dream of statehood viable. They must develop their copious oil resources. They must cement ties with bordering countries. And they must consolidate their hold over Baghdad politics. These moves run directly counter to the interests of Iraq, the country the Kurds are supposed to be paying more than their fair share.

OVER A DINNER of grilled fish, Tariq Namiq, a bespectacled thirtysomething journalist, argues passionately that Americans are fooling themselves if they don't consider all Arabs terrorists. His virulence reflects a long-standing fear. Ever since British and French imperial machinations grafted a portion of the mountainous Kurdish homeland to the artificially created Iraq after the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the Kurdish experience in Iraq has been a story of relentless and bloody repression. That repression reached its apogee in 1987 and 1988 with the *Anfal* genocide, during which Saddam murdered 100,000 Kurds, destroyed hundreds of Kurdish vil-

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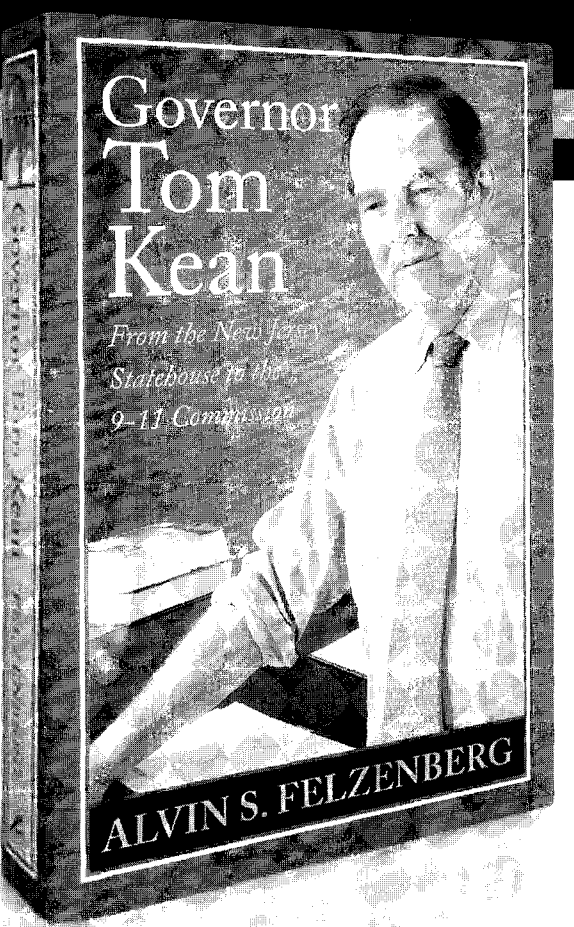

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—*Walter Isaacson, author of* Benjamin Franklin: An American Life *and coauthor of* The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made.

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lages, and evicted thousands of Kurds from Kurdish cities like Kirkuk. Namiq hosts a weekly TV program on the Kurdish network Zagros TV, which, he explains, reminds viewers that Kirkuk by rights belongs to Kurdistan, despite also being home to thousands of Arabs. When I ask if the Arabs can remain in the city—the Kurdish leadership insists they be relocated, and American diplomats have traced over 180 disappearances and kidnappings of Arabs to Kurdish forces—Namiq equivocates.

Namiq is hardly alone in his distrust of Arabs. Despite Kurdish prominence in Baghdad, no one in Kurdistan has much faith that post-Saddam Iraq offers the Kurds anything more than the torments of the past. The entrance of the Sunnis into the political process in December was met in Kurdistan with apprehension that the formerly dominant minority is simply trying to use ballots as well as bullets to regain power. "Everyone has to have both legs in—not one leg in terror and one leg in the cabinet," says Fadhil Merani, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) politburo who helped negotiate the sectarian character of the new government in Baghdad. Not that everyone thinks the Shia, with whom the Kurds allied against their mutual Sunni enemies, are much better. Many Kurds describe them as fanatical and backward proxies of Iran. Sunnis and Shia may not be able to find common ground in Baghdad, but, in Kurdistan, both are simply Arabs, and so both merit contempt.

For the last three years, American and Iraqi officials thought they had a solution to the Kurdish problem: federalism. Transforming Iraq from a centrally administered state into one where the various regions enjoy considerable autonomy from Baghdad was intended to mollify the country's mutually suspicious factions and keep the country whole. Indeed, federalism has been a nonnegotiable demand of the Kurds, who have always said that, unless post-Saddam Iraq allowed them tremendous freedom of action, they would have no choice but to secede. Accordingly, both the interim and permanent Iraqi constitutions contained far-reaching guarantees for regional autonomy. The permanent constitution, approved in October, allows Kurdistan to nullify unacceptable national legislation; to retain the 100,000-strong *peshmerga*; and to control much, if not all, of Kurdistan's oil wealth. But federalism has proved unacceptable to the Sunnis, who rejected the constitution en masse and only agreed to participate in the December elections after receiving U.S.-brokered assurances that they could seek to amend the document this year. Defending the controversial provisions of the Iraqi constitution in October, American Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad explained, "You couldn't bring the Kurds back into Iraq without federalism."

But, contrary to the White House's claim that federalism is "a prerequisite for a united country," federalism has stoked, not tempered, secessionism. In January 2005, as Iraqis voted to elect their first government, a referendum was held in Kurdistan asking respondents whether they would prefer independence. Nearly 98 percent of an estimated two million voters said yes. "Federalism is a fact that's imposed on us," explains Dilshad Farriq, a 27-year-old Persian-literature student at the University of Salahuddin. "Independence is something we want."

BUT INDEPENDENCE IS also something that the Kurds know they can't have—at least not yet. To understand why, one need only visit Zakho, a small city on the Turkish border, 100 miles northwest of Erbil. At first glance, Zakho is a boomtown. Seemingly everything outside of the already bustling city square is under construction, with massive cranes building enormous warehouses for companies like the Turkish appliance giant Arçelik. The marketplace at the center of town overflows with foot traffic, and the well-manicured parks, green even in winter, provide a stark contrast to the brown dreariness of the faraway capital. But Zakho, while prosperous, is also vulnerable. At one end of its sprawling Ibraheem Khalil Border Complex are two enormous iron gates, the near one black and the far one blue. On the black gate, FAREWELL is written in English and Kurdish. The blue gate, another 100 yards in the distance, announces TURKIYE. A caravan of trucks stretches from the two gates for miles, waiting for the chance to carry their cargo into Turkey.

The Kurds know that Turkey would not support an independent Kurdish state. Nor would Iran, Iraq, or Syria. As the Kurdistan Restaurant's façade testifies, all these neighboring countries have substantial Kurdish minorities. From the perspective of Ankara, Tehran, and Damascus, if Baghdad allows its Kurds to secede, their own will be next. Militarily, Kurdistan is vulnerable to its neighbors—Turkey foremost—which, if provoked by premature Kurdish independence, have no shortage of options for inflicting pain. The KDP's 70-year-old minister of *peshmerga*, Hahmid Effendi, says that, because of the *peshmerga*'s lack of aircraft and heavy artillery, "we can defend against the Arabs in Iraq, but not against the foreign countries." But neighboring countries wouldn't even have to invade to seriously damage a fledgling Kurdish state. Trade has made Zakho a rich town, but the gates are an ever-present reminder to Kurdish leaders that, should they push too far or too fast, Turkey can very easily slam them shut. If the Turks did so, the economic consequences for Kurdistan would be severe.

Yet, while Zakho highlights Kurdistan's precarious economic and diplomatic situation, it also holds the solution to both those problems. Last November, a small Norwegian company known as DNO began drilling just outside Zakho, and, on December 22, it struck oil. But, much to the consternation of Baghdad, the oil that emerges from Zakho will benefit not Iraq as a whole, but Kurdistan specifically. Article 109 of the Iraqi constitution calls for distributing oil and gas revenue between the regional administrations and the federal government—but that joint ownership only holds for "current fields," not new ones like Zakho. The Kurdistan Development Corporation estimates that Kurdistan possesses about 45 billion barrels of oil reserves, putting its oil potential on par with that of petro-giants like

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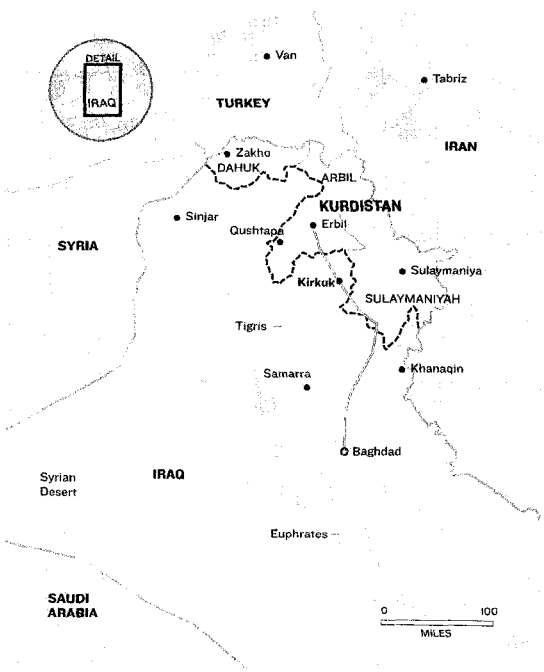
Nigeria. "Its prospectivity is beyond doubt," says Micael Gulbenkian, the chairman of the Canadian-based Heritage Oil Corporation, which has signed agreements with Kurdistan to develop a 300-square-kilometer field near Taqtaq and is negotiating for more. "Just extrapolate on the basis of the Kirkuk fields to understand the potential of that region." (Those fields are family history to Gulbenkian: Calouste was his great-uncle.)

The Kurds see that wealth as their ticket to independence. "We have to improve [the economy], especially with our oil, so then we can declare our freedom. Here, unlike in the rest of Iraq, it's secure, so Western countries come and invest, especially in oil, and so we will develop our economy," explains Dejar Ghafoud, a senior official in Kurdistan's interior ministry. "And, within ten to 15 years of federalism, the culture of the Arabs, Persians, and Turks will change"—that is, they will become more accepting of independence.

That's not infeasible. The Kurds have signed deals like the one with DNO with at least a half-dozen corporations. These include the Turkish oil companies Petoil and Genel Elektrik, both of which have contracts to develop oil and gas fields in the east. As Turkish companies come to view Kurdistan as a lucrative investment opportunity, the thinking goes, the Turkish government won't want to do anything bad for business—or for its aspiration to join the European Union—like invading an independent Kurdistan or shutting down Zakho's border crossing. "Turks are democratic people. Turks know the importance of self-rule," says Ilnur Çevik, a preternaturally sunny Turkish businessman. "In time, as things develop here, they will also develop in Turkey. We will develop a more positive look at Kurdistan."

Çevik should know. As president of the Çevikler Construction Company, he has built hundreds of units of housing in Erbil, Sulaymaniya, and elsewhere, and he has recently inked deals to build massive electrical power stations. His company's logo hangs over many of Erbil's numerous construction sites, and Çevik himself—an ex-adviser to legendary Turkish leader Süleyman Demirel—is a constant presence in the atrium of the Erbil International Hotel, the preferred place of business for the Kurdish capital's elite. Çevik is hardly the sole Turkish businessman developing Kurdistan. An official with the KDP's ministry of municipalities estimates that Turkish businesses signed contracts in 2005 worth nearly $200 million. Despite this, Turkish acceptance of Kurdish independence will not come easily. But Çevik notes one factor positively impacting Turkish views: "The Kurds did not split. On the contrary, we see that they made a great effort to become part of the Iraqi political process."



PAUL D. RODRIGUEZ

But, when it comes to oil fields like the one outside Zakho, the Iraqis are less convinced of the Kurdish commitment to a united country. The Sunnis and Shia disagree that Article 109 of the constitution guarantees the Kurds control over the newly discovered oil. "It's like they are an independent country," a member of one of the leading Sunni political parties complained to the *Los Angeles Times* as soon as DNO arrived at Zakho. "This is Iraqi oil and should be shared with all the Iraqi partners." Another prominent Sunni figure told Reuters, "This shows that the Kurdish administration in the north is not interested in safeguarding resources for all of the Iraqi people." And he vowed that, unless the Kurds reversed their position, "we will fight this through diplomatic and political channels." The stakes of that fight are extremely high for Iraq. Revenue from oil sales accounts for over 90 percent of the Iraqi government's budget, but insurgent attacks, decaying infrastructure, and lack of investment have brought oil production down to about 2.2 million barrels a day, less than before the war. Development of new fields is vital for Iraq's crippled economy.

This is exactly the type of situation that the Kurds want to avoid. With Baghdad and Erbil accusing each other of misrepresenting the constitution, the oil industry remains skeptical about investing in Kurdistan, its potential reserves notwithstanding. "What is the contractual, legal basis for development between [Kurdistan] and Iraq? No one knows," says Ed Morse, an energy analyst with Hess. As a result, while smaller, wildcatting oil companies fly into Kurdistan, the majors don't. "The Kurds need a recognized legal right to develop their oil," says Martha Brill Olcott, a former adviser to Unocal. "Without it, you can sell a little, and profit a little, but you're not going to get to the next stage."

The Kurds may just have enough political leverage to resolve the oil dispute on their terms. Talabani has proved that only the Kurds can hold the country together—an ability that has given them enormous power. Witness the scene on January 21. That day, in the well of the Kurdish parliament, the two main Kurdish political parties, the KDP and the PUK, formalized a power-sharing agreement: Unification, they believe, will make the Kurds an unstoppable juggernaut in Baghdad—in their quest not only to gain control of their oil but to enlarge their ter-

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ritory. Indeed, the unification accord explicitly calls for "restoring Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Sinjar, Makhmour, and other Arabized areas to the embrace of the Kurdistan Region."

That statement of purpose should unsettle anyone who isn't a Kurd. Yet, when it was unveiled, the parliament was stacked with Iraqi notables and foreign dignitaries determined to kiss the Kurdish ring. Khalilzad sat five seats from his Iranian counterpart, Hassan Kathemi Qummi—and their colleagues from Great Britain, France, and China weren't far away. Neither were Iraq's would-be leaders. The Shia politicians Adel Abdul Mahdi and Iyad Allawi, the ex-premier who seeks a comeback, made sure to clap at all the right moments. Allawi even spun the accord to me as "an achievement that shows the beginning of a process of cementing political progress." His enthusiasm paid off. In February, the Kurds threatened not to join a coalition government with the Shia unless Allawi's bloc received a cabinet post. It ultimately got six, including the justice ministry—something the Kurds are sure to remind Allawi of when it comes time to consider oil and Kirkuk.

Nor is anyone likely to forget the lesson of Ibrahim Jaafari. Throughout 2005, Jaafari, the prime minister, and Talabani, the president, fought over who was in fact the true power in Iraq. The final straw, however, came this February, when Jaafari took a trip to Ankara without inviting Talabani, raising the prospect of a secret Turkish-Shia deal to frustrate Kurdish ambitions. Forging a temporary alliance with the Sunnis, Talabani informed the Shia that Jaafari was an unacceptable choice as premier and held firm for months. Jaafari was forced to step down on April 20.

"We expect not just consolidation of our position in Baghdad, but enhancement," explains Shafiq Qazzaz, the minister for humanitarian aid. Qazzaz's title obscures his true role—de facto Kurdish foreign minister. "If this is handled like this—with our agenda respected by the Arabs—then, for years, co-existence with Iraq is possible. But not ultimately. Not ultimately."

Indeed, while both Sunni and Shia influence has alternately waxed and waned over the last three years, the Kurds have consistently and incrementally amassed power. By tilting at different times toward either faction, they have preempted challenges to their agenda, thereby advancing it. To Qazzaz, all this investment in Iraqi politics will pay big dividends on the international scene when Iraq collapses, as he believes it inevitably must. "We are committed to the creation of Iraq. We've taken extra steps, even," he says. "But then perhaps Iraq doesn't come through. The Iraq of law and order, equal rights, democracy—perhaps it doesn't come. Then we go to the international community and say: We tried. ... And what other option do we have, if not self-determination?"

AS THE KURDS advance their own agenda in ways that unavoidably conflict with Iraq's, Shia and Sunni opposition has grown. In a February Al Jazeera interview, radical Shia cleric Moqtada Al Sadr warned the Kurds: "No one has the right to demand Kirkuk," as many of the city's Arabs are his followers. (In an ominous move, Shia militiamen have flooded the city in recent weeks.) Furthermore, Iraq's neighbors may *never* acquiesce in the creation of a Kurdish state. Even Turks as pro-Kurdish as Çevik are discomfited by the idea. So are the oil companies. Gulbenkian, for instance, notes that "peace and stability" are prerequisites for investment.

And there's another obstacle: U.S. opposition to statehood. "Even over the long term, we believe in the territorial integrity of Iraq," says one American official. "We don't see anything good coming out of Kurdish independence." Others go further, saying that the only way to keep the Sunnis involved in the political process is to pressure the Kurds to reduce their demands for self-rule—both because the Sunnis oppose Kurdish independence and because the Shia have begun demanding as much regional autonomy as Kurdistan enjoys. But Khalilzad chooses to interpret Kurdish moves as ultimately consistent with Iraqi unity. As he left the Kurdish parliament following the unification ceremony, he portrayed the deal to me as a win-win arrangement: "It shows people coming together through dialogue and compromise, and that's what's needed for the future of Iraq as a whole."

Regardless, the Kurds don't put much stock in America's anti-statehood posture. To put it mildly, the United States has even less influence over Kurdistan than it does over the rest of Iraq. The last time Washington pressured the Kurds to mitigate their demands for autonomy was during the March 2004 negotiations over the interim constitution. And, as Peter Galbraith, the former U.S. diplomat and Kurdish advocate, has observed, in the permanent constitution, "the Kurds won every point that [former U.S. viceroy Paul] Bremer had refused." Even if the United States could interrupt the Kurds' strategy, it's unlikely that it would. By all accounts, Khalilzad heavily relied on Talabani to avert a full-fledged war after the Askariya crisis, reflecting the hard fact that the Kurds are the only friends the United States has in an ever-deteriorating Iraq.

The structural obstacles preventing the birth of an independent Kurdish state are tremendous and may well prove insurmountable. After all, the historical gamble that the Kurds are making depends on their ability to bend the unpredictable forces unleashed by the Iraq war in their direction. But, unlike the Sunnis, the Shia, and the Americans, the patient Kurds have yet to be disappointed. "We didn't promise our people any timetable for independence. We're not in any rush," says Merani. More importantly, "Iraq must come to realize that Kurdistan really means this," adds Qazzaz. "We accept an Iraq of pluralism and federalism, yes. But you look at Iraq and tell me: Can you build your hopes on such a country?" Qazzaz is calm as he continues. "We can't get [independence] tomorrow, nor next year," he acknowledges. "But the horizon is changing." ■

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Cogito ergo sum Newt.

The Thinker

BY JASON ZENGERLE

"WHO'S THAT GRAY-HAIRED guy in there with the monkeys and the Kennedy?"

It's a hot, humid summer afternoon at Providence's Roger Williams Park Zoo, and a young woman is asking about the enthusiastic gentleman who, along with Rhode Island Representative Patrick Kennedy, is behind the glass wall feeding mealworms to the white-faced saki monkeys. Kennedy, who is only a couple of weeks removed from an embarrassing stint in drug rehab, has the sheepish look of a man who would rather be somewhere—anywhere—else. But his silver-haired companion is having the time of his life. Wearing a squinty-eyed smile, his ample belly protruding over his belt and the white mop atop his head charmingly mussed, he holds out a palm filled with mealworms and watches the monkeys go to town. When his hand is emptied of the slimy treats, he turns to a zookeeper and asks for more. It's just another day in the life of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich—once the second-most powerful politician in the United States, but now just some guy feeding monkeys at the zoo.

The zoo trip, needless to say, was Gingrich's idea—*his* treat for appearing with Kennedy earlier in the day to give a bipartisan talk about health care at a business conference. It's not that Gingrich minds talking about health care; he just loves going to zoos. The Providence zoo, Gingrich eagerly tells its director, is the seventy-fifth or seventy-sixth zoo he's visited. In fact, before he decided to become an academic and then a politician, Gingrich confesses, he wanted to be a zookeeper.

As the zoo director leads Gingrich and Kennedy on a tour of the facilities, it's difficult not to wonder whether Gingrich made the wrong career choice. While Kennedy—who is dressed appropriately for the oppressive weather in a polo shirt and khaki shorts but still looks miserable—occasionally chimes in with an unconvincing "Isn't that the coolest?", Gingrich, who is sweating in suit pants and an Oxford shirt, asks questions that betray a startling degree of zoological expertise. How big does a flamingo herd have to be before the birds begin breeding? Are larger kangaroos as aggressive among themselves as wallabies? Does the zoo have "roar & snore" nights, when it allows visitors to sleep over? For more than an hour, Gingrich peppers the zoo director with such queries, stopping only to offer his own insights. "That's the darkest Masai I've ever seen," he marvels as he stands outside the giraffe enclosure.

Finally, it's time for Gingrich to leave, and, as he steps into a silver Lincoln Town Car, the zoo director shakes his hand, looking happy but also a bit dazed. (Most VIP visitors, he will later explain, aren't *that* interested in the zoo.) And then Gingrich is off to do the things he does when he's not conducting fact-finding zoological missions: writing books, giving $50,000-a-pop speeches, running his health care consulting business, offering the Bush administration advice on the war on terrorism, and, oh yes, laying the groundwork for his 2008 presidential campaign.

That's right, Newt Gingrich is running for president. Granted, he's not yet an official candidate, and, if you ask him whether he's running, he—like virtually everyone eyeing the White House this early in the process—will deny it. But, as soon as that denial leaves his lips, Gingrich, unlike other presidential candidates, will not-so-subtly undercut it—inviting you, for instance, to ask him again in August, when he'll be in Iowa glad-handing at the state fair. Because, as Gingrich himself seems to realize, the notion that he is running for president is, at least at first glance, unbelievable.

After all, it has been almost eight years since Gingrich last held elected office, and he didn't exactly leave on his own terms, resigning as speaker and from Congress after overseeing the Republicans' disastrous performance in the 1998 midterm elections. His time out of office has been similarly inglorious. Shortly after slinking off the political stage, Gingrich, who had mercilessly hounded Bill Clinton about the Monica Lewinsky scandal, went through marital difficulties of his own—ditching his second wife for the woman who would eventually become his third, a congressional aide 23 years his junior. More significantly, Gingrich has spent the last few years impotently watching from the sidelines as his crowning achievement, the 1994 Republican Revolution, succumbed to decadence and corruption, and many of the men whom Gingrich played a key role in bringing to prominence and power—men like Tom DeLay and Jack Abramoff—became poster children for political corruption. Suffice it to say, these are not the items of which presidential resumés are made.

And yet, were it not for these misfortunes, it's doubtful that the 63-year-old Gingrich would be contemplating the White House at all. First, there is the not insignificant matter of personal redemption: A presidential campaign, even an unsuccessful one, would go a long way toward erasing the bad memories of Gingrich's rushed and gloomy exit from the House. It would afford Gingrich the opportunity to defend the legacy of the 1994 Republican Revolution

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and rescue it from the grubby paws of people like DeLay and Abramoff, who, to some extent, have replaced Gingrich as the faces of that revolution.

More importantly, running for president would allow Gingrich to assume the role that comes most naturally to him: savior. Gingrich has always had an outsized image of himself—likening the political strategizing he did as speaker to Ulysses S. Grant's command of the Union Army or dubbing the course he taught at Kennesaw State University "Renewing American Civilization." And, despite the remarkable distance he has traveled from those heady days, that titanic self-regard remains. Gingrich's current political positioning, he explains, is about something much bigger than a mere presidential campaign. It's about "defining the idea context and solution context of the next generation of American politics." It's about "winning the future" (the title, incidentally, of one of his recent books). It's about nothing less than saving the United States from ruin.

One recent morning in Washington, Gingrich gives me a laundry list of the momentous challenges he believes the country currently faces—from the war with what he calls "the irreconcilable wing of Islam" to the rise of China and India to the epidemic of diabetes. But these aren't the only challenges, he explains. "I think the deeper problem," he says, a tinge of weariness creeping into his voice, "is the whole nature of the modern world." He grimaces. "I think that we are almost nowhere in explaining to ourselves how hard this is going to be." No one, Gingrich seems to believe, is capable of offering that explanation, much less acting on it. Not John McCain. Not Rudy Giuliani. Not even George W. Bush. No one, that is, except Newt Gingrich.

TALK ABOUT GINGRICH these days with any of his friends and admirers, let alone with the man himself, and you'll undoubtedly hear the same word: ideas. "If there was ever anyone in politics who's an ideas man," says New Hampshire Representative Charlie Bass, "it's Newt Gingrich." "Newt obviously has ideas," says Gingrich's former spokesman and *Washington Times* editorial page editor Tony Blankley, "so he gains cachet from the contrast with people just wandering around repeating slogans." Joe Klein, writing recently in *Time*, went so far as to jokingly propose a new federal position for Gingrich akin to party ideologist in the old Soviet Union—"party ideaologist."

Indeed, Gingrich is so full of ideas that he has actually created a physical repository for them—a twelve-by-eight windowless office at the American Enterprise Institute (where Gingrich is a senior fellow) in which, he says, "we're trying to literally organize layer after layer of ideas." There, two twentysomething Newtoids pore over copies of *Winning the Future*, boiling the book's essence down to short maxims that they then type on small sheets of white paper and thumbtack to the wall under headings like DEFEATING AMERICA'S ENEMIES, DEFENDING GOD IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE, and PROMOTING ACTIVE, HEALTHY AGING. "It's a work in progress," one of them says when I visit, apologetically pointing to a bare spot on the wall.

The notion that Gingrich is brimming with ideas—on everything from animal husbandry to the health care system—is, of course, nothing new. An old joke in Republican circles, dating back to the early '80s, when Gingrich was just a backbencher, was that his office had file cabinets stuffed to the point of overflow with NEWT'S IDEAS and one uncluttered desk drawer labeled NEWT'S GOOD IDEAS. But the degree to which Gingrich and his allies go out of their way these days to portray him as a "man of ideas" almost certainly has something to do with their desire to distinguish him from DeLay—and to try to separate the House leadership under Gingrich from the House leadership that followed. As one Gingrich booster puts it rather explicitly, "DeLay was about power. Newt was about ideas."

When Gingrich talks about his speakership, he does so in the way Democrats of a certain age talk about the Kennedy administration. "It's a little bit like Camelot," he says. "There was this golden moment when Republicans cared about ideas and kept their word." He adds, "There's a certain virtue to my having left, because there's a clear break point, and then, after I left, gradually the spirit of DeLay and Abramoff became symbolic."

It's a nice story, if not an entirely accurate one. After all, while Gingrich was never personally fond of DeLay, he did bring him onto his leadership team, making the man known as "the Hammer" his whip. He also supported DeLay's efforts to turn K Street into a solidly Republican enclave. "I remember Newt talking about how the K Street Project was important," says DeLay's former spokesman John Feehery, "because, ultimately, the real place where the fund-raising happens starts with K Street." Abramoff, meanwhile, didn't make the career transition from Hollywood producer to Washington lobbyist until after the 1994 midterms, when his old pals from his College Republican days became ascendant. "Yesterday I had the opportunity to meet privately with Speaker Newt Gingrich," the new lobbyist wrote in a February 1995 letter pitching his services to the governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, "and was able to raise the issue of the desire of the CNMI for more latitude in dealing with its own affairs."

And then there were Gingrich's own scandals—including a run-in with the House Ethics Committee over the use of tax-exempt funds to pay for his political activities that resulted in a formal reprimand and a $300,000 penalty. Gingrich blamed these troubles on Democratic efforts to demonize him—a somewhat ironic charge from a man who had disseminated to GOP colleagues a list of recommended terms to describe their Democratic opponents, including "sick," "corrupt," and "traitors." In other words, most of the problems that crippled the House Republicans during the days of DeLay and Abramoff—the raw exercise of power, the rampant corruption, the hyper-partisanship—were also there,

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at least in embryonic form, during Gingrich's reign. "Newt wasn't just a piano player while all this stuff was going on upstairs," says Marshall Wittmann, who served as the Christian Coalition's director of legislative affairs during the beginning of Gingrich's speakership. "The seeds were being sown for what eventually took place back in those early years."

Gingrich prefers to ignore these inconvenient facts. In his retelling, the House under his leadership was a laboratory of problem-solving that not only cut taxes, reduced the debt, and balanced the budget, but even took crucial steps that benefited the war on terrorism. "The 9/11 Commission described the Gingrich plus-up and said it was the only increase in intelligence spending in the '90s," the man responsible for said plus-up boasts, "and [George] Tenet has said that, without that plus-up, the system would have broken down." The sum total of his and the Republican revolutionaries' actions, Gingrich argues, was nothing short of monumental. "What we did was create a solution-oriented, idea-based, grassroots movement that led Washington by changing the country."

Gingrich says all this, he hastens to add, not to brag but to impart a lesson—a lesson not everyone has learned. "I think neither Bush and Rove in Texas nor the DeLay faction ever understood what we did," he tells me. "They didn't study it, they didn't think about it." On another occasion, addressing a group of scholars and reporters at the Brookings Institution, Gingrich is still more specific. "I think the Gingrich model of an idea-led, contentious Republican Party that fought and argued and debated is a lot better as a model than 'the Hammer,' " he says. "If you just think about it, if you think you're in an age where you need new ideas, a hammer is a relatively dumb symbol."

DAVID COWLES

A prolific author, Gingrich has written four alternative historical fictions—spinning tales of what would have happened had the Confederates won at Gettysburg or had the United States not confronted Nazi Germany—and is currently at work on a fifth about the Pacific theater in World War II. But there is no alternative history that seems to interest him so much as the one about what would have happened had he not politically imploded in the late '90s. Had he remained speaker, Gingrich tells me, DeLay, for one, would have been held in check. "He never would have had the level of power that he had," Gingrich says. "It wouldn't have happened, and I would have been consciously organizing and helping younger members create countervailing centers of ideas."

But his political downfall, Gingrich believes, had ramifications that stretch far beyond what transpired in the House after his departure. "I think, when I was speaker, you could argue that it was the second-most powerful office in the country," Gingrich says. And there was a time—prior to the government shutdown, prior to the impeachment debacle—when Gingrich seemed to be on a glide-path to the *most* powerful office in the country. He was viewed by Republicans as both Moses and Joshua, having led his people out of bondage and into the promised land, and many assumed he would be their presidential nominee in 2000. It's an agonizing game of "what if" for Gingrich, because, as he never tires of pointing out, he was right about so many things that others were wrong about—leaving implicit the suggestion that, had he been in charge, certain catastrophes could have been avoided.

Like September 11. Gingrich guides the skeptical to his 1984 book *Window of Opportunity*, in which he urged the United States to confront terrorism.

Or Katrina. Gingrich tells the story of how, "in August of last year, before Katrina, I went to see Cheney and Rice and Rumsfeld, and I said, look, you have an enormous systems crisis. ... I said, 'You're going to have a catastrophe.' "

Or Iraq. "For reasons I don't understand," he says, "in June of 2003, [the Bush administration] decided to go for an American occupation. ... I was screaming at Rice, Cheney, and Rumsfeld. ... Now, had we appointed Khalilzad to be ambassador in June of 2003, I think we would have saved at least 1,000 American lives, and we would have ended the war much earlier."

When I finally ask Gingrich point-blank what would

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have happened had he not resigned as speaker, he gets a far-off look in his eyes. My question is specifically in the context of the House, but Gingrich doesn't take it that way. Rather, he heads straight for the bigger picture. "It's hard to go back and imagine," he says in a wistful tone. "It would have been a different world."

FOR THE TIME BEING, Gingrich has had to settle for more modest satisfactions. He has the Center for Health Transformation, his for-profit health care consulting business, and Gingrich Communications, his political shop, which combine to give him a staff of about 25—more than some congressmen. When he's not in his Washington office or at his home in suburban Virginia, he's typically appearing on Fox News, where he's on contract as a commentator, or traveling the country delivering speeches—often for astronomical fees—in front of groups that range from Michigan's Ottawa County Republican Party to the National Plastics Expo. "I once asked Gingrich years ago how he'd like to be remembered," his political Svengali, Joe Gaylord, tells me. "His reply was that 'I'd like people to think of me as a patriot and a teacher.' I think he's in both roles right now."

For all the material and psychological comfort those roles may provide Gingrich, he clearly believes that they also entail making others uncomfortable. To the extent that he has a stump speech for his nascent presidential campaign, it involves explaining to his audiences that the United States is on the brink of calamity. In late June, on the same day that he later blitzes the Providence zoo, Gingrich offers his dark vision to a gathering of venture capitalists and private equity managers at a tony seaside resort in Newport, Rhode Island. His ostensible topic is health care, but, in order to put the crisis into context, he explains, he must offer a broader societal critique. And that critique begins, as it does in seemingly every speech Gingrich makes these days, with a particular historical analogy. "I believe that the scale of total challenge we face is more like April 1861 than any other period since then," Gingrich says. He goes on to explain that April 1861 was the month Fort Sumter was fired upon, setting off a chain of events—from the Civil War to the construction of the transcontinental railroad to the printing of paper currency—that no one at the time foresaw. "You go back through the cold war, the Second World War, the Great Depression, the First World War—each of those were large, singular, focusable events. In some cases, they were excruciating, but they were containable," he says. "We're going to be hit over the next 15 or 20 years with so many different things simultaneously that the total number of solutions we have to come up with is going to stretch our capacity as a society to talk to itself well enough to actually reach agreement to get something done."

For Gingrich, the deeper problem, as he might put it, is not so much the size of the challenge, but that no one is prepared to face it—especially not President Bush. Gingrich's relationship with W has never been close. Part of that is because the two men have not had many occasions to interact: When Gingrich was leading the Republican Revolution in Washington, Bush was in Austin learning how to be a governor; by the time Bush was ready to move onto the national stage, Gingrich was in political Siberia. When Bush became president, Gingrich had good relationships with Dick Cheney (from their time together in the House), Donald Rumsfeld (from their work on defense issues), and Condoleezza Rice (whom he met at Stanford's Hoover Institution, where he's a visiting fellow), so he tended to communicate his ideas through them. But, more than the lack of personal connection, it seems clear that Gingrich's biggest problem with Bush is that he doesn't put much stock in Bush's intelligence. "There is a certain smartest-kid-in-the-class syndrome here," says one Gingrich friend, trying to explain the relationship—or lack thereof—between the two men.

To raise the topic of Bush with Gingrich, I read him a quote he gave to *The New Yorker* shortly after September 11, in which he said of the president, "You have to remember, this is a Texas governor learning to be leader of the world." Looking back over the last five years, I ask, does he think Bush has learned that role? "I think he's a lot better than he was in 2001," Gingrich replies. And that's as far as he'll go. Two days before, U.S. forces in Iraq had killed Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, and, while Gingrich is obviously pleased with the news, he's angry at Bush for the way he delivered it. "This was the moment to say, 'We got Zarqawi, but you need to remember ... this is a worldwide campaign with worldwide complications, and it's going to go on a long time,' because every time the country looks up, they need to be reminded of that." He adds, "I think the administration is trapped in normalcy."

And that, in Gingrich's view, is a tragedy, because normal leaders are not what these times call for. "The genius of guys like Lincoln and Reagan and FDR—the great communicator leaders—is that they're actually educators, so they understand when they use a phrase that they have to explain it, because, by definition, you won't understand it or they wouldn't need to be using it," he says. "I think Bush is like a lot of managers who think, if they repeat it, it's your problem to figure it out. Now, no great teacher believes it's your problem to figure it out, because most of the students won't." He goes on, "I think Bush represents a Harvard Business School model of leadership, as opposed to an educator-communicator model." It's an odd insult coming from a man who once taught a business course at Kennesaw State University, but it's an insult nonetheless.

GINGRICH SAYS HE won't make a final decision about whether to run for president until 2007. "Sometime late next year, we'll look," he explains, "and then, if at that point there's still a huge vacuum, and if at that point there's enough interest, we'll probably do something." In the meantime, he's making sure that, when that moment comes, he'll be ready to pull the trigger. He's a long shot to secure his party's nomi-

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nation, but perhaps not as desperate a long shot as you might initially think: While he may be anonymous to visitors at a zoo, he still has fantastic name recognition among the people who vote in GOP presidential primaries. In a recent Gallup poll of national Republicans, Gingrich placed third, behind Rudy Giuliani and John McCain, among potential 2008 presidential candidates. And, in June, Gingrich was the top vote-getter in a 2008 straw poll at the Minnesota Republican Party state convention.

"There'll be a moderate candidate like Giuliani or McCain," predicts conservative activist and longtime Gingrich friend Grover Norquist, "and, as soon as conservatives realize they don't want that, they'll grab the prominent conservative, who could be [Senator George] Allen or could be Newt." Gingrich, Norquist continues, "is by far the best speaker and presenter. ... He's got star quality; people want to come and listen to him." Even if Gingrich doesn't win—as almost certainly will be the case—by running for president, he'll ensure that more people, not to mention more reporters, listen to what he has to say, a benefit he himself acknowledges. His presidential posturing will have gotten him, and his ideas, some of the attention he believes they deserve.

But is attention all that Gingrich thinks he's owed? He repeatedly emphasizes that he doesn't miss being in charge, that he doesn't *need* to be president. "Nixon had this remarkably effective, deeply intense will to power," he says. "Reagan and I have a will to ideas." He's constantly boasting about the influence he has behind the scenes—about the 53 hours of classified briefings on Iraq and the war on terrorism the administration gave him in one month alone; about his access to Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, and now Karen Hughes, who had him into her State Department office a few months ago to pick his brain on public diplomacy; about the reception he receives from congressional Republicans when he's on the Hill. "Almost everybody answers my calls," he says.

And yet, Gingrich's actions often seem to betray his frustration that, when people do answer his calls, he's the one giving the advice, rather than the one deciding whether or not to take it. A couple of years ago, for instance, Gingrich spoke to House Republicans about the Medicare bill. As Indiana Representative Mark Souder, who came to the House in 1994 as part of the Republican Revolution, recounts, "He gave the best defense of the bill I've ever heard—better than the president, better than anybody. Then he proceeded to say at the end, 'If you don't vote for this, I want you to come explain to me why.' And it was like, 'Newt, you're not even a congressman anymore. We're not going to your office.' " Souder adds, "There's an old country music gospel song by the Oak Ridge Boys that goes something like, 'Nobody wants to play rhythm guitar behind Jesus / everyone wants to be the leader of the band.' Newt Gingrich is no rhythm guitar person."

Indeed, Gingrich's self-regard is such that his current lack of power inclines him to cast a gimlet eye on the entire American political system. One morning in Washington, after he has finished a rooftop interview with Black Entertainment Television and before he goes to speak at the Brookings Institution, Gingrich sits in a borrowed office inside a TV production facility and talks to me about his political hero, Abraham Lincoln. Lately, Gingrich says, he's been spending a lot of time thinking about Lincoln's Cooper Union speech. "Here's a guy who's basically saying, 'I can take 7,300 words to center the North on an explanation of who we are, on which I'm prepared to stake my candidacy for the presidency,' " Gingrich says, becoming so immersed in this retelling that, as is often the case, he seems to forget that there's anybody else present. "And he spent three months personally writing it, and he then goes to the newspapers that night to make sure they get it technically right in their editing. He then gives the same speech in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire, and goes home. And that's it. He doesn't say anything for the rest of the year."

Finished with his reverie, Gingrich comes back to earth and evidently notices the quizzical look on my face. What does Lincoln's Cooper Union speech have to do with his presidential ambitions? Before I can ask, Gingrich continues. "It is totally outside the Washington conversation," he says, a bit petulantly. "So you can imagine if we'd had the modern Washington, and everybody here would have gossiped about the fact that this defeated yokel from Springfield gave this speech. It would be a one-day story in ABC's *The Note* or something, and it would disappear. We wouldn't understand what Lincoln was doing." He goes on, "So all I'm saying is, you could have a moment in time where the country would be prepared for a serious conversation, and the question will be whether or not the political and the news-media class could actually present a serious conversation that the country is ready for."

Just minutes earlier, Gingrich's press aide, Rick Tyler, had interrupted to tell his boss that Fox News wanted to know whether he was available to do a segment that weekend. Gingrich said yes to the request, so I ask him, in light of his doubts about the news media's ability to present a serious conversation, if he thinks going on Fox—which is not exactly renowned for facilitating serious conversations—is really a useful exercise.

Gingrich is momentarily flustered, but he quickly sees a way to reconcile the contradiction. "If I'm on by myself, it is," he replies, explaining that he tries to avoid panels with more than one guest because they typically "degenerate to the dumbest idea." Warming to the subject, he continues, "It depends partly on the quality of the questions people are willing to ask you. Hannity and Colmes and O'Reilly are more focused on what's today's news story. But what I try to do is take today's story and try to link it to a larger lesson." Now Gingrich is smiling. "And I can do that on those shows," he says, a note of triumph creeping into his voice, "because they treat me with respect." At least someone, it seems, appreciates his genius. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

New Perceptions

IN 1897, JOSEPH CONRAD, WHO had written three novels that dealt with Asia and the sea, decided to write a story quite different in setting and tone—"a London story," he called it. "The Return" was indeed drastically different from Conrad's previous work: it concerned a wealthy London couple and their marital crisis. The material had some relation to what English dramatists—Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, for instance—were trying to do at the time, possibly influenced by Ibsen: they were looking at marriage with new candor and understanding, rather than with the formal criteria of the past.

GABRIELLE
(IFC First Take)

Conrad's story has been adapted for the screen by Patrice Chéreau and Anne-Louise Trividic, and is now called **GABRIELLE**. Chéreau, eminent in theater and film, has directed. The adapters have changed the scene to Paris but have remained in the late Victorian era, and though they have added material, they have concentrated on the quintessence of the couple's lives that Conrad captures so keenly:

> They skimmed over the surface of life hand in hand, in a pure and frosty atmosphere—like two skilful skaters cutting figures on thick ice for the admiration of the beholders, and disdainfully ignoring the hidden stream, the stream restless and dark; the stream of life, profound and unfrozen.

Conrad's story and this film deal with a moment when that stream is no longer hidden.

The husband, Jean Hervey, rich and generally content with his judgment and aplomb, not especially interested in emotions, has been married for ten years. (Conrad says five years: perhaps the film doubles the span to fit the two leading actors.) One late afternoon he returns from work to the mansion, prodigally staffed with servants, where he lives with his wife, Gabrielle. The screenplay here adds a sequence about the previous Thursday evening, one of the Thursdays when the Herveys entertain with large formal dinners. This flashback is like a large helping of the formalities—the ice skatings—that constitute their lives.

When Jean gets home this afternoon, Gabrielle is not there. Upstairs he discovers a letter that she has left for him; he reads it and learns that Gabrielle has left him for another man. Then comes the Conrad touch. After Jean has gone through some spasms of shock, Gabrielle returns. As the title has foretold, this is the crux of the story. She admits an affair with the other man. She had left today to live with him, but she cannot go through with it. She calls the letter a mistake. The long scene that follows between Gabrielle and Jean is the heart of Conrad's story and this film.

Love, what that word can mean, in all its iridescent gleamings; self, in all its proud and petty aspects; realizations about marriage—all are elements in this fascinating, painful scene. It can best be summarized by saying that these two people move through a drama that is larger than they would have expected themselves to be capable of, a drama that shakes their beings. We can infer that Gabrielle was the first to explore the stream beneath the ice and that her action has compelled Jean, too, to plunge. Late in the film (and story) comes a line that discloses much of how they have been living and why she attempted to change. Gabrielle had wanted, she thought, a more fully charged life, but on her way to the other man, she had realized that this would be too demanding. When Jean at last declares his love, Gabrielle says, "If I had believed you loved me ... I would never have come back."

So much of this adaptation is engrossing that the script's additions are jarring—Jean's near rape of Gabrielle on a stairway, her disrobing in their bedroom so that sex may reunite them. (The sex doesn't happen.) After their intent at the start to keep their troubles from the servants and others, they quarrel publicly the next evening—one of their Thursdays. These interpolations, though they can just possibly be mined out of Conrad, still smack of movie-making.

Cinematically, too, there is a puzzle. Chéreau moves recurrently through three visual modes: black-and-white, color, and a sort of blue overlay. (All are superbly handled by Eric Gautier's camera.) The blue shading first occurs just after Jean reads the letter. We think that Chéreau is tinting the shot to fit the mood; but this pattern is quickly disturbed. We never quite understand why he is using any one of the three modes at any particular moment.

But, aside from these inexplicable color variations, Chéreau's directing is fine. He is a master of two kinds of movement: he moves his camera with an assurance and relevance that are in themselves exciting; and, uncommonly for a film director, he moves his actors within any shot like a discerning choreographer. Crowning all this, he has drawn exceptional performances from his two principals.

Isabelle Huppert is not by usual disposition an emotional actress. Much of her best work has seemed to rely on the camera to find and convey what is deep within her (*The Judge and the Assassin*), and when this doesn't succeed (*Madame Bovary*), the effect verges on stolidity—she is sexy, of course, but aloof. Occasionally she cuts loose (*The Piano Teacher*). Here Huppert gives Gabrielle an extremity of emotion so affecting that she seems to find her feelings as she goes. Pascal Greggory creates a Jean who metamorphoses. At the start he is somewhat smug, yet insidiously enviable. The changes that Greggory conveys throughout the film create a sensual pilgrim's progress to a

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surprising yet comprehensible finish. Fabio Vacchi's score is chamber music that lurks tactfully under the drama.

Postscript. Vincent Sherman, the veteran Hollywood director, died on June 18, just a month short of his hundredth birthday. The news reminded me of a story he once told me. I never met Sherman, but in 1989 he wrote me a generous letter about a review of mine, which, from the director of *Mr. Skeffington* and *Harriet Craig* and *The Young Philadelphians*, was very welcome. We then corresponded occasionally. The story came along after I had done an obituary piece about Marcello Mastroianni in 1997. Sherman wrote to me that in 1955 he had been directing a film in Italy when he went to see a production of *Uncle Vanya* with Mastroianni (then relatively unknown) as Astrov. Sherman was so impressed that he went backstage afterward to meet Mastroianni. "I made a proposal to Marcello: that if he would come to America and learn to speak English I would pay his travel fare, provide him with a teacher and pay him $200 a week for one year," Sherman wrote. "His obligation to me would be to allow me to manage him for a few years."

The actor declined, and in light of his subsequent career, we have to be glad. Still, I thought it somehow fitting that the director of Bette Davis and Claude Rains and Humphrey Bogart, among many others, had been perceptive enough to make the offer. ■

Ruth Franklin

Bursting the Thermometer

BLACK SWAN GREEN
By David Mitchell
(Random House, 294 pp., $23.95)

"I LIKED IT." IS THERE ANYTHING less interesting to say about a book? Every negative piece is negative in its own way: we remember with a grim chuckle Mark Twain's enumeration of James Fenimore Cooper's literary offenses ("There have been daring people in the world who claimed that Cooper could write English, but they are all dead now"), or Nabokov's epistolary rebuke of Edmund Wilson ("A patient confidant of his long and hopeless infatuation with the Russian language, I have always done my best to explain to him his mistakes of pronunciation, grammar, and interpretation"), or Dale Peck's excoriation in these pages of Rick Moody ("Rick Moody is the worst writer of his generation"). But happy reviews are all alike. A book's plot is engaging, the characters feel true, the writing is interesting. So what?

The writer seeking fresh language with which to express her enthusiasm soon discovers that this particular vocabulary has been colonized by p.r. flacks whipping up empty, fluffy blurbs. The result is that all praise now feels like exaggerated praise. Sixty years ago, Orwell famously complained of the book reviewer's clichés, the "stale old phrases" that get trotted out in the desperation of deadlines: "a book that no one should miss," "something memorable on every page." Nothing has changed, not even the syntax. In this blurbing age, we are still deluged by dizzy claims: that a novelist we know to be decidedly mediocre is "like a latter-day Dostoyevsky," or that a pop historian's latest hack job should be "required reading in living rooms from coast to coast," or that "every single note is perfection" in a piece of chick lit so bad that I could manage only a few chapters. New examples appear in the book reviews every week: recently Nadine Gordimer, in a hollowly glowing review of Philip Roth's *Everyman*, referred in passing to "his superbly matchless work, 'The Plot Against America.'" Whatever was right or wrong with *The Plot Against America*, in no meaningful sense can it be called "superbly matchless." We damn not with faint praise, but with hyperbole.

In an earlier essay, "In Defense of the Novel," published in 1936, Orwell argued that the inflation of praise is not only alienating to the reader, but actually damages the novel's prestige. Take it as a given that the majority of books published are something less than superbly matchless—that they are, in Orwell's word, "tripe." The reviewer is charged with offering an honest evaluation of what he reads. Yet various things prevent him from doing so. The first is the corruption of the book review industry, which Orwell described as a "simple and cynical swindle": "Z writes a book which is published by Y and reviewed by X in the *Weekly W*. If the review is a bad one Y will remove his advertisement, so X has to hand out 'unforgettable masterpiece' or get the sack." (This is an oversimplification, but it is not without an element of truth.) The second is that no one wants to read "This book is tripe" again and again, which means that "X has got to discover something which is *not* tripe, and pretty frequently, or get the sack." The only way to do so is to debase his standards:

> To apply a decent standard to the ordinary run of novels is like weighing a flea on a spring-balance intended for elephants. On such a balance as that a flea would simply fail to register; you would have to start by constructing another balance which revealed the fact that there are big fleas and little fleas. And this approximately is what X does.... This means sinking his standards to a depth at which, say, Ethel M. Dell's *Way of an Eagle* is a fairly good book. But on a scale of values which makes *The Way of an Eagle* a good book, *The Constant Nymph* is a superb book, and *The Man of Property* is—what? A palpitating tale of passion, a terrific, soul-shattering masterpiece, an unforgettable epic which will last as long as the English language and so on and so forth. (As for any *really* good book, it would burst the thermometer.)... There is no way out of it when you have once committed the initial sin of pretending that a bad book is a good one. But you cannot review novels for a living without committing that sin. And meanwhile every intelligent reader turns away, disgusted, and to despise novels becomes a kind of snobbish duty. Hence the queer fact that it is possible for a novel of real merit to escape notice, merely because it has been praised in the same terms as tripe.

But is it really true that no one wants to read page after page of "This book is

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tripe"? Surely the health of book reviewing is endangered not by someone like Dale Peck—whose wildly negative piece on Rick Moody, which appeared four years ago, still comes up whenever the public conversation turns to the climate of literary judgment—but by those critics who, for a variety of reasons, reject straight talk about bad books. In her founding essay for *The Believer*, Heidi Julavits, positioning herself as a kind of anti-Peck, earnestly lamented a particular kind of critical attack as "snark": the act of reviewing a writer's career and publicity rather than his or her work, "a scornful, knowing tone frequently employed to mask an actual lack of information about books." Of course critics should review books rather than personalities—but that point seems to have gotten lost in the pages of Julavits's own magazine, which actually thrives on literary personalities (what other justification could there be for Nick Hornby's asinine column?), and where the desire for "nice reviewing" has thoroughly enervated the discussion. But other critics were noticeably reluctant to jump on Julavits's bandwagon, and even the "Snarkwatch" section of *The Believer*, intended as a bulletin board for the defanging of hostile critics, quietly disappeared soon after its inauguration.

YET IF "NICE REVIEWING" HAS attracted few explicit defenders, a number of today's critics nonetheless seem to share a tacit understanding that it is somehow indecorous—what used to be called bad form—to come out and say that a book is bad. Peck's critics generally lambasted him not for the substance of his judgments, but for his unwillingness to play by what they determined to be the rules. "If you're going to be in it for the big run, you have to act responsibly," intoned Sven Birkerts, whom Peck had criticized precisely for his tendency to be overly generous in his criticism. (Birkerts did not elaborate on what he meant by this, but presumably, if you're "in it for the big run," whatever that means, you will inevitably run into some of your subjects at cocktail parties—or, worse, they will someday review *your* books.) John Leonard, in a scalding review of *Hatchet Jobs*, Peck's collected essays, in *The New York Times Book Review*, laid out his own idea of literary etiquette in these guidelines for "responsible reviewing": "First ... do no harm. Second, never stoop to score a point or bite an ankle. Third, always understand that in this symbiosis, you are the parasite."

Leonard has never been able to abide by these rules himself. What critic could? And so his review of *Hatchet Jobs* is typically full of gleeful jibes and personal attacks. He concluded it with the following story:

> Many years ago the editor of this publication asked me to review John Cheever's last, brief novel, "Oh What a Paradise It Seems," after he had already been turned down by half a dozen critics who knew that Cheever was dying but thought his new book a weak one and didn't want to compromise their supreme importance with a random act of kindness. It never occurred to me that a thank-you note to a wonderful writer, a valediction as it were, would get me kicked out of any club that I wanted to belong to, so I immediately said yes. At the time, besides that review, I wanted to write a message to those preening scribblers who thought they were too good for lesser Cheever. On a card, in small caps, I would have said what I say to Peck:
> GET OVER YOURSELF.

This self-aggrandizing little anecdote nicely illustrates the hypocrisy of "nice reviewing." The Cheever review with which Leonard is so pleased was actually a masterpiece of obfuscating generalities and flaccid platitudes that are immediately transparent to anyone with half a talent for reading between the lines. Such studies in opacity are hardly unusual. Just look at Robert Stone's recent notes—I can hardly call the piece a review, since it coyly refused to offer any assessment at all—on John Updike's turgid new novel, also in the *Times Book Review*. The theory behind Stone's affectation of neutrality was articulated in his interview with the editors, presented on the *Book Review*'s inside front cover, in which he remarked that "the vocabulary of dismissal is something we've seen too many times. We don't need another exercise in that."

I doubt that the "preening scribblers" Leonard derides thought they were "too good" to review Cheever. I suspect, rather, that they were trying to show that, Orwell's pessimism notwithstanding, it is *not* impossible to review novels for a living without committing the sin of pretending that a bad book is a good book. For the reviewer's obligation is neither to the reader nor to the author, but to himself—and it is wrong to compromise one's integrity even for the sake of generosity. Who is served by Leonard's and Stone's dull and unconvincing pieties? Not the reader, who, if he is so naïve as to take them seriously and actually read the recommended book, will surely be disappointed. Not the publishing industry, since, as Orwell pointed out, if readers are disappointed in novels often enough, they will stop buying them altogether. And certainly not the author, who must be canny enough to deduce the truth himself—or, in the case of Cheever, is subjected to posthumous humiliation at Leonard's supposedly noble hands. If these are the rules we are supposed to play by, I'm with Dale Peck.

II.

BAD REVIEWS ARE MOTIVATED by anger, but good reviews are motivated by love; and it is easier to become angry than to fall in love. Every reader had a first love, most likely in childhood: a book that we could not get enough of, and guarded selfishly for fear that someone else might come to think of it as their own; a book with which we identified completely; a book to which we probably would not want to return as adults for fear that it might not live up to our memories. Perhaps we were serial monogamists, who exhausted the entire work of one author only to move on to another the next month or year. Perhaps we were polygamists, who could not be satisfied by one book at a time, but had to have many all at once, from different genres and different time periods. But whatever our inclinations, over the years our capacity to love books becomes dulled by repeated frustration. Every time we pick up a book, we expect to fall in love; but after a certain number of disappointments, our expectation turns to mere hope; and eventually we give up even that.

But no true reader ever gives up entirely. We still want to be moved deeply; we are still looking for books that, as Orwell put it, will burst the thermometer. But for the critic, finding such a book brings its own set of problems. Falling in love, even with a book, makes you vulnerable, and most of us are not inclined to parade our vulnerabilities in public. Even worse, falling in love makes

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Jerusalem (I)

Whose city — whose "holy city" — is it?

It is thirty-nine years since Israel's victory in the Six-Day War in 1967, that the city of Jerusalem, which had been divided for nineteen years, has been reunited under Israeli rule. But there is still much talk, and many people insist, that solution of the "Middle East Problem" will not be possible until Israeli Jews relinquish their "occupation" and restore the holy city — or, at the very minimum, its eastern part — to its "rightful owners", the Moslem Arabs.

What are the facts?

A city of many nationalities. Before the end of the 1967 Six-Day War, during which the Israeli Defense Forces re-conquered Jerusalem from the Jordanians, claims to Jerusalem being a Moslem holy city were rarely, if ever, asserted. Jerusalem had always been a city in which many religions and nationalities lived side by side. It was only after the old city was back in Jewish hands that the Moslem Arabs declared their willingness to wage "jihad" (holy war) to bring the city back into Arab possession.

The notion to call Jerusalem an Islamic holy city has only come about in modern times, especially after the Arabs lost the city to Israel in the Six-Day War. It now has gained currency by dint of constant repetition. The basis for the claim is that Jerusalem does indeed contain an Islamic holy site, namely the Temple Mount (sacred to both Moslems and Jews) with its two mosques, El Aksa and the Dome of the Rock. It is the place from which Mohammed is believed to have ascended to heaven. Mohammed never set foot in Jerusalem. But aware that it was the holy city of Christians and Jews, and wishing to convert them to his new religion, he commanded his followers to build a mosque in Jerusalem. But never in Moslem history did this mosque compare in significance to the Moslem holy cities of Mecca and Medina — cities that no "infidel" may visit.

A tenuous Moslem claim. It's on the basis of this religious tradition that the Moslems designated the entire Jewish Temple Mount to be their holy site. The Israeli Government, in its constant spirit of accommodation to Moslem sensibilities, has largely acceded to this tradition and has put the area in and around the two mosques entirely under Moslem control. But how would Christians feel if, instead of from the Temple Mount, Moslem tradition had Mohammed ascend from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and if the Moslem Arabs were to claim that site as their property? The Christian world, often ready to consent to Moslem claims against Jews and Israelis, would be greatly astonished and would certainly resist such claim. But Moslem Arab assertiveness doesn't end there. On the tenuous claim of their right to the Temple Mount, they have construed a claim to the entire city of Jerusalem (or at the very least to its eastern part), which they have declared to be their "third holiest city". And it would be an insult to all Moslems and all Arabs to leave the city in the hands of the "infidel Jews".

> "Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish life, of Jewish yearning, and of Jewish thinking for over 3000 years. That is the reason that the State of Israel has rededicated the Jewish holy city to be its capital."

Jerusalem: Never an Arab capital. But the city of Jerusalem — in contrast to Baghdad, Cairo, and Damascus — has never played any major role in the political and religious lives of the Moslem Arabs. It was never a political center, never a national or even a provincial or sub-provincial capital of any country since biblical times. It was the site of one Moslem holy place, but otherwise a backwater to the Arabs. The passion for Jerusalem was not discovered by the Moslem Arabs until most recent history.

A center of Jewish life. Jerusalem has stood at the center of the Jewish people's national life since King David made it the capital of his kingdom in 1003 BCE. It remained the capital until the kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians 400 years later. After the return from Babylonian exile, Jerusalem again served as the capital of the Jewish people for the next five and a half centuries.

Jews are not the usurpers in Jerusalem. They have been living there since the Biblical era and have been the majority population since the 19th century. Jews have synagogues and other holy sites in most cities of the world. But do they claim sovereignty over those cities because of it? Of course not! It would be preposterous and people wouldn't accept it. And the Moslem Arab claim to Jerusalem, based on the mosques on the Temple Mount, is just as untenable. Jerusalem has been the center of Jewish life, of Jewish yearning, and of Jewish thinking for over 3000 years. That is the reason that the State of Israel has rededicated the Jewish holy city to be its indivisible capital.

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you blind to faults; and so you find yourself overcompensating, looking for flaws where none exist. Also, as a reader it is wonderful to be alone with your love, but the reviewer has a professional obligation to sing a good book's praises from the mountaintops. But how do you convince anyone that you have found "a novel of real merit" when the simplest phrases ("I liked it") are boring and the elaborate ones ("superbly matchless") have lost their meaning?

OF ALL THE BOOKS THAT I have read as an adult, the novels of David Mitchell have come closest to resurrecting my own childhood reading utopia. A Briton who spent many years in Japan and now makes his home in Ireland, Mitchell has been quietly building momentum since his first novel, *Ghostwritten*, appeared in 1999. He has picked up honors and accolades, but he has also provoked a groundswell of popular excitement that is unusual for a novelist of his youth (he is thirty-seven) and his difficulty: each of his books is a complex literary puzzle that defies conventional narrative forms. The reviews of Mitchell's novels have been respectful but largely distant; the news of his writing has spread through that age-old marketing mechanism, word of mouth. I was first introduced to Mitchell by an acquaintance who handed me *Ghostwritten* with the words "This is different." It was not long before I passed my copy on to a friend with the same recommendation.

It seems somehow appropriate that Mitchell's novels would find their readers through personal contacts, because on their most fundamental level all his books are concerned with the connections between human beings, and with the relationship between those connections and some grander idea of the universe. *Ghostwritten* comprises nine self-contained chapters, each of which takes place in a different setting—Tokyo, St. Petersburg, rural Ireland—with different primary characters. The stories are all connected by the literary equivalent of a glance—a wrong number dialed on the phone, a shared train compartment, a collision on the street that knocks a pedestrian out of the path of a taxicab—to form a mosaic of the human condition at the end of the second millennium, which culminates in a terrifyingly original vision of possible apocalypse. *Number 9Dream*, which appeared in 2001, follows a sixteen-year-old boy on a search for his father in a ghastly journey around Tokyo and its environs, which becomes an ever-shifting landscape of fantasy and reality. *Cloud Atlas*, Mitchell's third novel, takes the kaleidoscope of *Ghostwritten* and multiplies it to the nth power: it features six distinct (but, again, linked) storylines, each with its own plot, characters, genre, and sometimes dialect; and each set in a different part of the globe and in a different time period, from the South Seas in the mid–nineteenth century to the Far East in the almost-foreseeable future to Hawaii at what might be the end of the world.

In the hands of a less talented writer, all these innovations could feel like nothing more than pyrotechnics, a writer's excuse for showing off his smarts. When a writer's delight in the edifice he has constructed subsumes his delight in his fiction, then the book can feel like an empty stage on which the novelist declaims his own cleverness. (Paul Auster and William T. Vollmann are among the contemporary writers who suffer from this problem.) Mitchell has been accused of being both deliberately difficult and not serious enough: the *Sunday Telegraph* caused a mini-tempest by declaring that it would not review *Cloud Atlas* because the critic to whom the assignment was made had found the novel "unreadable," whereas in *The New York Times* Mitchell's gambits were called "obvious" and his book "not nearly as smart as its author." But when the method works, as it does in Borges or Joyce or Nabokov or Calvino, the literary puzzle serves as an immensely entertaining point of entry into the deeper reality of the fiction. And it reminds us that all great literature is a puzzle to be fitted together by the reader, who happily engages in the mental work of sorting its various characters and plots and images and allusions until something resembling a coherent picture takes shape.

WITH *BLACK SWAN GREEN*, Mitchell seems to have paused for breath. The new novel is the least formally innovative of any of Mitchell's fictions so far, which comes as a certain relief after the hyperkinesis of *Cloud Atlas*; it is as if, after expanding the novel form to something approaching its outer limits, he has collapsed it back in again. The book takes place in thirteen consecutive chapters, one for each month from January 1982 to January 1983. Its territory is decidedly more mundane than the gangster underworld of Tokyo or the doomsday wreckage of the Americas: a bad marriage turning worse; the torments of school; the first crush, first cigarette, first encounter with the world of ideas beyond Black Swan Green, the claustrophobically cozy village where Jason Taylor, the book's narrator, is growing up. (The local joke is that there are no swans of any color.) But on the level of language, *Black Swan Green* is Mitchell's most adventuresome work yet. The difference is that while language previously played a supporting role to his formal experimentation, here he performs his experiments within the medium of language itself, and with brilliant results.

To understand Mitchell's method, it is worth going back for a moment to *Ghostwritten*, in which one of the nine narrators is an invented being: a disembodied spirit that calls itself a "noncorpum," which travels the planet transmigrating from one person to another, scouring the consciousnesses of its human "hosts" and assimilating their memories and knowledge as its own: "I knew their secrets, the bends of the village's streams and the names of its dogs. I knew their rare pleasures that burned out as quickly as they flamed up, and the memories that kept them from freezing." This roving spirit is a perfect image for the way Mitchell works. Like his noncorpum, he roams among fantastically diverse characters, discovering their secrets and pleasures and memories, and inhabiting them fully yet invisibly.

The result is a narrative that feels at once private and universal, intimately in tune with each character's thoughts and feelings and spoken in a language that he or she might actually use. No other contemporary writer I know has depicted in such a honest yet readable way what really goes on inside the human head—not just the scattered fragments of half-thoughts, but more importantly the narratives that we tell ourselves about our own lives. It testifies to Mitchell's profound understanding of his characters that his penchant for re-using them in his later work—in one particularly amusing example, Neal Brose, the corrupt Hong Kong banker in *Ghostwritten*, appears in *Black Swan Green* as a teenage budding capitalist—never feels gimmicky, but only deepens his fictional world.

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SINCE THE LANGUAGE OF MITCHELL'S fiction is always constructed to the specifications of whatever character he is inhabiting at the moment, stepping into it is initially bewildering. Consider this passage near the beginning of *Black Swan Green*, in which Jason describes the hierarchy among the boys at his school:

> Moron's my height and he's okay but *Jesus* he pongs of gravy. Moron wears ankle-flappers from charity shops and lives down Druggers End in a brick cottage that pongs of gravy too. His real name's Dean Moran (rhymes with "warren") but our P.E. teacher Mr. Carver started calling him "Moron" in our first week and it's stuck. I call him "Dean" if we're on our own but names aren't just names. Kids who're really popular get called by their first names, so Nick Yew's always just "Nick." Kids who're a bit popular like Gilbert Swinyard have sort of respectful nicknames like "Yardy." Next down are kids like me who call each other by our surnames. Below us are kids with piss-take nicknames like Moran Moron or Nicholas Briar, who's Knickerless Bra. It's all ranks, being a boy, like the army. If I called Gilbert Swinyard just "Swinyard," he'd kick my face in.

This is a lot to throw at an uninitiated reader. Some of it is ordinary British slang, which probably sounds odder to the American ear than it actually is ("pongs of gravy," "ankle-flappers"). But the creative re-naming of everything and everybody that Jason describes—"names aren't just names"—takes place on multiple levels. Sometimes the novel uses words that Jason himself does not understand, though he pretends to ("I didn't dare ask what a 'Brummie' was in case it's the same as 'bummer' or 'bumboy,' which means homo"). Names reflect deeper truths as well as popularity rankings: Jason's eighteen-year-old sister Julia calls him "Thing," and he refers to his own dark side as "Unborn Twin" or "Maggot." And word choices must be constantly recalibrated: Jason is fond of using "epic," a synonym for "cool" that is usually italicized for added impact ("The lake in the woods was *epic*"), but after cooler kids tell him repeatedly that nobody says it anymore, he finally gives it up, at least in public.

Three Poems by Constantine P. Cavafy

Ionian

Because we broke up their statues,
because we drove them from their temples—
no, the gods never died because of that.
O land of Ionia, they love you still,
their souls hold your memory still.
When an August morning dawns over you
your atmosphere draws energy from their life;
and sometimes an ethereal youthful figure,
indistinct, swift in transition,
passes through, high above your hills.

Of the Jews (50 A.D.)

Artist and poet, sprinter and discus-thrower,
like Endymion in his beauty: Ianthes, Antony's son
from a family with close connections to the Synagogue.

"My most honorable days are those
when I leave off the quest for beauty,
when I abandon the austere elegance of Hellenism
with its sovereign dedication
to perfectly formed and perishable white limbs.
Then I become the man that I would wish
to remain forever: son
of the Jews, the sacrosanct Jews."

Most impassioned, this declaration of his: "To remain
forever . . . of the Jews, the sacrosanct Jews—"

Yet in fact he remained nothing of the sort.
The Hedonism and Art of Alexandria
held on to him, their child and votary.

On the Ship

It's certainly like him, this little
likeness done in pencil,

quickly sketched, on the ship's deck,
one enchanting afternoon,
the Ionian sea all around us.

It's like him. Yet I recollect him as more beautiful.
He was agonizingly sensitive
and that irradiated his expression.
He appears more beautiful to me
now that my soul recalls him, out of Time.

Out of Time. All these objects are so old—
the sketch, and the ship, and the afternoon.

—translated by Peter Green

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Language is a particular obsession for Jason for two reasons. The first is that he suffers from a debilitating stammer, which provides much fodder for the book's comic moments but causes him no end of anguish. He nicknames it Hangman, because it first appeared during a game of hangman at school, but also because he imagines it with "snaky fingers that sink inside my tongue and squeeze my windpipe so nothing'll work":

> The only way to outfox Hangman is to think one sentence ahead, and if you see a stammer-word coming up, alter your sentence so you won't need to use it. Of course, you have to do this without the person you're talking to catching on. Reading dictionaries like I do helps you do these ducks and dives, but you have to remember who you're talking to. (If I was speaking to another thirteen-year-old and said the word "melancholy" to avoid stammering on "sad," for example, I'd be a laughingstock 'cause kids aren't s'posed to use adult words like "melancholy."...) Another strategy is to buy time by saying "er..." in the hope that Hangman's concentration'll lapse and you can sneak the word out. But if you say "er..." too much you come across as a right dimmer. Lastly, if a teacher asks you a question directly and the answer's a stammer-word, it's best to pretend you don't know. I couldn't count how often I've done this. Sometimes teachers lose their rag (specially if they've just spent half a lesson explaining something) but *anything*'s better than getting labeled "School Stutterboy."

Jason's linguistic creativity is not limited to his games with Hangman; he is a writer, publishing his poems in the parish newsletter under the pseudonym Eliot Bolivar. And the language of the novel mimics Jason's own experiments as he tries to find his voice. Sometimes the results are as unintentionally hilarious as his nom de plume, especially when the subject has anything to do with sex, which Jason is still too immature to comprehend. (Spying on a couple making love, he observes that the girl makes a sound "like a tortured Moomintroll.") Sometimes his prose suffers from a case of similes gone wild: the sky over the English Channel is "as turquoise as Head and Shoulders shampoo"; "beef gristle tastes like deep-sea phlegm." Sometimes he careens wildly between the literary and the mundane: "Bluebells swarmed in pools of light where the sun got through the trees.... Blackbirds sang like they'd die if they didn't. Birdsong's the thoughts of a wood. Beautiful, it was, but boys aren't allowed to say 'beautiful' 'cause it's the gayest word going.... A peardrop sun dissolved in a sloped pond. Superheated flies grandprixed over the water. Trees at the height of their blossom bubbled dark cream by a rotted bandstand."

But even when his registers are off, Jason is magnificently inventive. Neil Young "sings like a barn collapsing." An elderly lady who admires Jason's poetry "schwurked wine round her mouth." Crossing a parking lot in the rain, he jumps "from dry bit to dry bit like James Bond froggering across the crocodiles' backs." And sometimes he gets things just right. The lake where he smokes his first cigarette with his cousin Hugo is "nervous with riplets and counter-riplets." Tulips in his mother's garden are "black plum, emulsion white, and yolky gold." During a pause in one of his parents' fights, "something silent smashed without being dropped." After Jason's nemesis, Ross Wilcox, pushes him into a mud puddle in front of everybody, "a fresh bomb of laughter blew me into tiny bits." A playing field in autumn is "the color paintbrush water goes." By the end of the novel Jason has yet to master his stutter, but he is gradually learning to bring the written word under his control. After exposing a classmate who has been running an extortion racket, he reflects with satisfaction on the astonishment of his peers: "That appalled silence was *my* handiwork. Words made it. Just words."

III.

MITCHELL HAS ALWAYS PAID sly homage to his literary heroes. Nabokov and Borges are the patron saints of *Ghostwritten*, and Melville has a disguised cameo in *Cloud Atlas*. In *Black Swan Green*, Mitchell acknowledges his debts even more explicitly. Jason's writing exercises take him on a tour of the young adult classics, and part of the fun of reading the novel is tracking the references, which appear in unexpected places. Jason tries on a variety of styles: the first chapter, a ghost story, references the Brothers Grimm, while Jason's torment by the class bullies comes to a head against the backdrop of *Lord of the Flies*. But the book's guiding spirit is Henri Alain-Fournier, whose brief novel *Le Grand Meaulnes* is perhaps the paradigmatic novel of adolescence.

Le Grand Meaulnes (the title is untranslatable, but it means something like "The Great Meaulnes") is a gorgeously written, shamelessly nostalgic book that owes much of its mystique to the tragedy of its author, who was killed in World War I at age twenty-eight. It contains two parallel narratives. The first is the story of the book's narrator, François Sorel, the invalid son of a country schoolmaster whose life is transformed one day by the arrival of Augustin Meaulnes, a new student who quickly becomes the object of François's veneration. The second is the story of Meaulnes himself, who loses his way one day on an errand and finds himself at a ramshackle country estate, where a band of children are celebrating a grand party in honor of the marriage of Franz de Galais, himself just a teenager. Meaulnes falls instantly in love with Franz's sister Yvonne, but the party dissolves hastily when word arrives that the marriage has been called off. Returning home, Meaulnes becomes fixated on what happened to him at the strange estate, which takes on an almost magical quality, and obsessively pores over maps in the hope of finding his way back to Yvonne, eventually setting off on another journey that will have even more profound consequences.

In Mitchell's novel, *Le Grand Meaulnes* becomes Jason's first point of contact with the world of literature beyond the typical boyish escapes of science fiction and comics—he is introduced to it by the elderly poetry-lover, who briefly takes charge of his education. (It also appears, comically, in a scene that takes place on the grounds of an insane asylum.) On the surface, Mitchell's thoroughly contemporary, acerbic, unsentimental tone seems to have little in common with Alain-Fournier's dreamy confection. But the two books, separated by almost a century, are preoccupied with the same basic themes of adolescence: first love, the disruption of parental relationships, the allure of an older role model, the dark secret that must finally be brought to light, and most of all the fascination of the world beyond home and school. For it is only in leaving home—and all the great novels of adolescence are quest novels, from Huck Finn rafting down the Mississippi to Holden Caulfield's tour of New York City—that one can become an

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adult, which is the unspoken object of each of these quests. By the end of the novel, Jason will leave Black Swan Green, as he must.

Until now, Mitchell has seemed far more interested in the world beyond, understood in the largest sense: the climax of *Ghostwritten* takes place at a satellite's remove from Earth, while *Cloud Atlas* reaches into a future that is barely recognizable as our own. The surprise of *Black Swan Green* is not, as some critics have suggested, that Mitchell has written a "conventional" novel (it is far more original than that drab description suggests). It is that he has written a domestic novel, a novel that is contained entirely within the everyday concerns of a thirteen-year-old boy rather than taking on the deepest mysteries of the universe. At first glance, this seems a narrowing of focus, but it is actually a broadening. For the writer who is truly and deeply interested in how the world works, everything about it is worth learning how to describe, even beef gristle.

A book that so deliberately sets out to rewrite a genre seems to demand comparison with its forebears. So I feel I should say that *Black Swan Green* is the funniest novel of adolescence since *Catcher in the Rye*, or the most painful portrait of boyish aggression since *Lord of the Flies*, or the most inventive depiction of teenage language since *A Clockwork Orange*, or the most nuanced account of the loss of innocence since *Le Grand Meaulnes*. But all that sounds far too much like the cackling of the blurbs. So I will just say that I liked it. ■

Joseph Frank
The Editorialist as Hero

CAMUS AT COMBAT:
WRITING 1944–1947
Edited by Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi
Translated by Arthur Goldhammer
(Princeton University Press, 334 pp., $29.95)

ALBERT CAMUS WILL PROBably be more familiar to American readers as a novelist and short story writer, or as a philosophical essayist and political polemicist, than as a journalist. But in the early years of his career, before *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger* had made their mark, he was best known for his journalism. Alice Kaplan, a scholar of the checkered and tormented history of France's emergence from German occupation and the Vichy regime, rightly says that the "daily editorials [by Camus] in the resistance newspaper *Combat* ... made him famous, and he emerged from the war as a moral and intellectual leader of postwar France."

This exciting new book contains the articles that Camus published between 1944 and 1947 in *Combat*, an underground journal established before France was liberated, and continuing to appear for a few years afterward. They provide the English reader with a rewarding immersion in a little-known part of Camus's work as he was blossoming into a writer of world fame, and also in the social and political questions that provoked Camus's pieces, which have lost none of their acuity. It is astonishing to see how many of the issues on which Camus comments, and which were broached by the situation in which he was writing, anticipate and prefigure problems that continue to afflict us today. In his commentaries, Camus never stays on the surface of the events that provide his starting point; he is always searching for the deeper causes—moral, social, psychological, or ultimately religious (though he was not a believer of any kind)—that motivate human behavior. For this reason, many of these occasional writings still live.

Journalism played a large role in Camus's life, particularly in the early years of his career, when he was still living in Algeria and beginning to develop intellectually. Unlike most French intellectuals of his generation, who were born into bourgeois families, Camus came from a working-class background. His family lacked any but the most rudimentary education, and his widowed mother worked at menial and ill-paid tasks. Luckily, a teacher in his elementary school, to whom he later dedicated his speech accepting the Nobel Prize for literature, recognized the young man's abilities, gave him extra assignments and lessons, and recommended him for scholarships that allowed him to continue his education. He eventually obtained a diploma in philosophy, with an erudite study on the relations between Hellenism and early Christianity that illustrated his intimate familiarity with the classical authors of that period. (In his later work he often makes casual references to ancient writers, and his first play, *Caligula*, is based on material from Suetonius and Seneca.)

Ordinarily, he would have then taken the competitive exams for the *agrégation* to obtain a teaching post in the French school system, but he became ill with tuberculosis and was unable to move onward to the next level. To support himself, Camus worked at a number of jobs—in the weather service, as an automobile salesman and a shipping agent, and in the city prefecture. He also taught in private schools, and in 1938 he became a member of the staff of a newly established newspaper of vaguely left-wing character, first called *L'Alger Républicain* and then *Le Soir Républicain*. Camus's contributions ranged over a wide variety of subjects; they occupy more than a hundred pages in my old copy of the Pléiade edition, now being extended from two volumes to four. The Camus of *Combat*, in other words, was already an old journalistic hand.

Two things are worth noting here about Camus's contributions to these other journals. The first is a series of articles titled "The Misery of Kabylia," based on travels in Kabylia in 1939, and sharply critical of a French policy that had led to famine. Many of his wartime articles in *Combat* return to the defects of the French colonial administration, about which Camus was much better informed than the critics who later attacked him so ferociously during the French-Algerian War, and against which he had taken a stand long before then. He also frequently wrote reviews of books, including one of Sartre's *La Nausée*, or *Nausea*. Working at that time on early drafts of the philosophy of absur-

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dity that he later expounded in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus instantly recognized the merits and the importance of Sartre's novel.

Yet he also remarked that "[Sartre] has perhaps not provided the true meaning of his anguish when he insists on what repels him in mankind rather than grounding his reasons for despair in some of [mankind's] grandeurs." For Camus, the "grandeur" of mankind was precisely its struggle to overcome the reasons for despair within the limits of possibility, while acknowledging that no ultimate solution could be found to this endless task. From the very first, then, Camus refused to accept the repugnance toward mankind that was so prominent in Sartre, and so unforgettably dramatized in the latter's play *Huis Clos*, or *No Exit*.

When *The Myth of Sisyphus* was published in 1942, it was at first considered a part of the philosophy of existentialism brought into vogue by Sartre's novel, and also by his major philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*. In 1945, however, Camus told a journalist: "I am not an existentialist. Sartre and I are surprised at always seeing our two names associated. We even think of publishing a small ad declaring that the undersigned affirm they have nothing in common." The moral nihilism that in the early Sartre emerges from his concept of freedom can be linked to his complete disinterest in politics before the war. Camus, by contrast, joined the Communist Party in 1934, was particularly active on behalf of the Muslims, and was excluded from the party in 1937 because he sided with a Muslim group against the party line at that time. Such treatment may well explain his later rejection of *any* political position as unassailable dogma.

In 1940, refusing to bow to the demands of censorship, Camus quit the Algerian newspaper and went to Paris. His friend Pascal Pia found him a job at *Paris-Soir*, but not as a journalist: he was employed in a technical capacity to help in the concrete tasks of putting the paper together. Not that he minded such mechanical employment; indeed, it was the only sort of post that he would have accepted at this publication, which catered, as he remarked in his notebook, to "the spirit of shopgirls."

Camus left this job in 1940, after the French defeat, the establishment of the Vichy government, and the German occupation. In the following year he joined the French Resistance after reading about the execution of Gabriel Péri, a French communist politician who had been troubled by the Hitler-Stalin pact and expressed a certain amount of independence from the party line. Camus became a journalist again with *Combat* in 1943. By this time *The Myth of Sisyphus* had attracted considerable attention; and one of the consequences of Camus's growing reputation was his employment as an editorial reader of manuscripts at Gallimard, the most important and influential publishing house in Paris. He took up residence in the apartment of André Gide, continuing to write for *Combat* at the same time.

Albert Camus by Jack Coughlin for The New Republic

CAMUS'S EDITORIALS TOUCH on so many issues that it is difficult to give any simple overview of them. Moreover, since the background of events to which he refers is likely to be unfamiliar to non-French readers (one wonders how familiar this history is any longer to the French themselves), it may be helpful to summarize the political situation of the time. In 1944, the Allied armies had liberated French territory as far as the foothills of the Vosges mountains, and between August 20 and August 25 the Germans were retreating from Paris, harassed by street fighters from the French Resistance. Orders had been given to destroy the city, but the officers of the Wehrmacht who were in command had refused to carry them out.

An ecstatic article in *Combat* of August 24, 1944 provides a fine example of this journalist's extraordinary literary gift—the restrained but vibrant poetry that Camus was always able to muster, a style that evokes not only the present but also the past, even in his physical descriptions. "Paris is firing all its ammunition into the August night," he writes. "Against a vast backdrop of water and stone, on both sides of a river awash with history, freedom's barricades are once again being erected. Once again justice must be redeemed with men's blood." Camus never forgets the human cost involved even in this celebration of freedom restored. His lyricism always has a moral and philosophical dimension.

Another passage is even more poetic:

> As freedom's bullets continue to whistle through city streets, the cannon of liberation are passing through the gates of Paris amid shouts and flowers. On this sultriest and most beautiful of August nights, the permanent stars in the skies above the city mingle with tracer rounds, smoke from burning buildings, and variegated rockets proclaiming the people's joy. This night unlike any other ends four years of a monstrous history and an unspeakable struggle that saw France at grips with its shame and its fury.

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It is little wonder that such prose won the writer and the paper many devoted readers.

France at that time had no official government. A provisional one had been organized by Charles de Gaulle, but the Allies hesitated to accept it because, under the circumstances, no elections of any kind had been held. Commenting on a speech of Churchill's expressing his sympathy for France but leaving the question of recognition unclear, Camus remarks that "it is no secret that certain quarters of American officialdom are opposed to recognition." One reason is "opposition to General de Gaulle personally"; another is the belief that the party of the Resistance is "entirely communist." Camus considers this to be an internal French matter that should not influence the problem of recognition, and remarks that "we are not obliged to approve of General de Gaulle in every instance or to share all his views of the Communist Party." (Nor did Camus ever feel obliged to share all the views of the Communist Party.) Even though no elections had been held, he insisted that "the people have just spoken ... they spoke with their rifles and grenades from many barricades." He believed (or wished to believe) that the country had become united by its opposition to the German occupation. "We experienced four years of fraternity," he writes, basing his hopes for the future on this presumed fulfillment of one of the French ideals.

For all his hatred of the Vichy regime, Camus had no sympathy for the unstable democratic state that it had replaced, which he chastises in the severest terms. The Resistance, he declares, will have accomplished "only an infinitesimal part of our task if the French Republic of tomorrow were to find itself, like the Third Republic, under the strict control of Money." In the first freely published issue of *Combat*, which appeared on August 21, 1944, Camus defines what he believes Frenchmen then wanted: "a single politics in the noble sense of the word. Having begun with resistance, they want to end with Revolution." What this means is "to be done with the spirit of mediocrity and the moneyed interests and with a social state whose ruling class failed in all its duties.... We want without delay to institute a true people's and workers' democracy.... We believe that any politics that cuts itself off from the working class is nothing."

These words were written in the first glow of liberation; but Camus's hopeful enthusiasm gradually ebbed once the compromises and concessions of ordinary political life began to exercise their inevitable sway. He could not reconcile himself to this return of politics as usual, which he believed had led the Third Republic to its ruin, and he attacks the so-called "political realism" that invariably involves a surrender to existing circumstance. "Thus in politics realism is always right, even if it is morally wrong," he wrote on August 29. He was particularly merciless with those run-of-the-mill politicians who had been even minimally guilty of accepting in any way the government of Marshal Pétain and Vichy: "We are resolved ... not to open the doors of French politics to those who left at a time when the resistance was prepared to welcome them."

In an article devoted to a speech by the minister of information, who had been a resister from the earliest days, Camus wrote approvingly that he "has ana-

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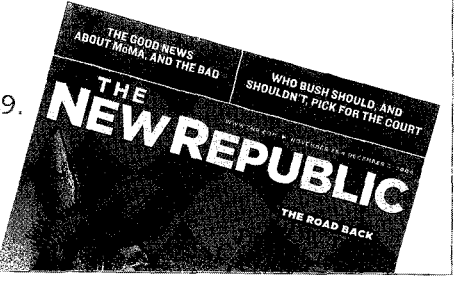

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lyzed the mechanism of concession that led so many Frenchmen from weakness to treason. Each concession made to the enemy and each decision to follow the path of least resistance led to another.... Two acts of cowardice added up to dishonor." No politician who behaved in this manner escaped the pitiless lash of Camus's censure.

One of the thorniest problems of the Liberation was how to deal with collaborators. The problem of *épuration*, or purification, as it was called, is an issue that comes up again and again in Camus's articles. It is also an issue on which he entered into a famous polemic with François Mauriac, the important Catholic novelist, who had distanced himself from right-wing French Catholicism by his attacks on fascism in the 1930s and his later sympathy for the Resistance.

Camus at first adopted a very hard line on collaborators. After describing in ghastly detail an atrocity committed at Vincennes, presumably by the Vichy militia ("and the men who did these things were men polite enough to give up their seats on the subway"), he asked: "Who in such circumstances would dare to speak of forgiveness? ... It is not hatred that will speak out tomorrow but justice itself, justice based on memory." He was among those who were in favor of capital punishment for "those who killed and those who permitted murder," since both were "equally responsible before their victims."

Mauriac protested against any indiscriminate application of the death penalty, and invoked the Christian principle of charity to counterbalance the demands of justice. Camus replied that "so singular is the virtue of charity ... that in calling for justice I seemed to be pleading on behalf of hatred." But Camus insisted that "in dealing with these mundane matters," it is not necessary "to make an absolute choice between the love of Christ and the hatred of men.... Between these two extremes we are searching for the just voice that will give us truth without shame."

As time went on, it became clearer and clearer that the *épuration* had not found "the just voice" to which Camus aspired—not only in this instance, but on every other social and political issue as well. On the contrary, as he wrote in January 1945, "columnists and editorialists can thus take their pick of absurd sentences and preposterous instances of leniency. In between, prisoners are snatched from their prisons and shot because they were pardoned."

Later in the same year, Camus protested against the purge trials even more strongly: "There can no longer be any doubt that the postwar purge itself has not only failed in France but is now completely discredited. The word 'purge' was already rather distressing. The actual thing became odious." He continued to support the death penalty throughout 1944, but by the summer of 1945 he was writing that "[the tribunals] will go on handing out death sentences to journalists who don't deserve as much. They will go on half-acquitting recruiters [who served the Vichy government] with silver tongues. And the people, tired of their sick justice, will continue to intervene from time to time in cases that should no longer be their concern."

Robert Brasillach, a brilliant journalist and writer, had used his considerable talents to denounce the opponents of Vichy in the most virulent and dangerous terms, but when the fascist writer and collaborator was condemned to death, Camus signed a petition against the sentence (which was nonetheless carried out). He made it clear that he abhorred everything Brasillach represented, but also that "I have always been horrified by the death penalty, and I have judged that as an individual the least I could do is not participate in it, even by abstention." By this time he had become a principled opponent of the death penalty, and he continued to remain so. In a speech given at a Dominican monastery in 1948, he declared that "I have come to recognize in myself and publicly here ... that on the exact issue of our controversy, François Mauriac was on the right side and I was not."

Most of the particular matters on which Camus writes have long since fallen into oblivion and are the concern only of scholars and historians. But he had an unerring eye for what the future was to hold for France, and one can only be impressed by his prescience in recognizing what would happen to the French colonial empire as a result of World War II. Another example of such prescience, which today seems astonishingly close to home, stems from his perception that all such empires were doomed, and that "colonial civilizations from the four corners of the earth are making themselves heard. Ten or fifty years from now, the challenge will be to the preeminence of western civilization."

With reference to his own time, he had no illusions about Indochina, where, "as everyone knows," the budget was balanced "by selling opium, just as [the government] browbeat 'local elites' and oppressed the people." Commenting on a statement by de Gaulle that matters would change for the better, Camus remarks that if improvements are seen as concessions rather than as "formal signs of a policy of emancipation," the reforms will have little effect: "Indochina will be with us if France leads the way by introducing both democracy and freedom there. But if we hesitate at all, Indochina will join forces with anyone at all, provided they are against us." Whether the Indochinese would ultimately have consented to French rule, if a serious effort of reform had been made, may well be doubted; but Camus was right to consider it the only hope. Nothing of the kind happened, and the French army finally capitulated to the forces of Ho Chi Minh at Dien Bien Phu.

Camus was much more familiar with Algeria than with Indochina, and his numerous articles on the Algerian situation emerged from his own experience. In 1936, he had agitated on behalf of a plan of the government of Léon Blum to grant political rights to certain categories of the Muslim population; but this was fiercely opposed by the local French population, who (as Camus later remarked) also supported Vichy. When the plan re-emerged in 1944, the Arabs who had favored it earlier were quite wary of accepting it. In a piece called "Time Marches On," he observes that "Arabs seem to have lost their faith in democracy, of which they were offered only a caricature." But he gives careful attention to a plan offered by one Algerian Arab leader, which, while not calling for separatism, nonetheless proposed a federal arrangement with a parliament containing 50 percent representation of the Arabs.

All this came to nothing because of an uprising in several Algerian localities that led to many French deaths. "Unfortunate and innocent French victims have lost their lives," Camus wrote, "and this crime itself is inexcusable. But I hope that we will respond to murder with nothing other than justice, so as to avoid doing irreparable harm." This plea was the only one of its kind in the furious

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French reaction, which led to a merciless slaughter in reprisal. "Do you truly want to be hated by millions of people, as you have hated thousands of others?" Camus asked his French readers. "If so, let things continue on their present course in North Africa." They did, and the result was the French-Algerian War, which led to Algerian independence only after a bloody conflict and with consequences still unresolved today.

Camus was caught in the middle, feeling the Arabs to be justified by their previous mistreatment, and using his influence to free those political figures whom he knew to have been unfairly imprisoned. But his view of the problem was more complicated—tormentedly so. In 1957, at a press conference in Stockholm after receiving the Nobel Prize, he famously said this: "I have always condemned terrorism. I must also condemn a terrorism blindly carried on [by the insurgents] in the streets of Algiers ... and that one day could strike my mother and my family. I believe in justice, but I will protect my mother before justice."

This statement was wrongly interpreted as an unequivocal defense of the French. In fact, it showed Camus defending human values, as he always did, against the claims of political abstractions that could lead to justifying murder—and had done so on both sides. But his remark unleashed a storm of criticism that for years made him a pariah among the French left-wing intelligentsia.

All this occurred long after his articles in *Combat* had appeared, but Camus's statement in Stockholm was foreshadowed by positions that he took in these earlier years. In 1946, for example, in a series titled "Neither Victims nor Executioners" (printed under his own name and given special prominence), he attempted to define the moral and political stance that he was seeking. He called it "a relative utopia." By this he meant "a philosophy free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise." People such as himself, he said, are not after "a world in which people don't kill one another (we're not that crazy!) but a world in which murder is not legitimized."

These articles are directed primarily against the socialists, who were caught in a contradiction between their moral values and a Marxism that they refused to abandon even though it made nonsense of their moral aims. Marxists, Camus declared, are ready to accept "a hundred thousand deaths" to provide for "the happiness of hundreds of millions." But "the certain death of hundreds of millions of people ... is too high a price to pay for the supposed happiness of those who remain." He implored his readers to join him in doing battle "within the historical arena in order to save from history that part of man which does not belong to it." Later he used the same type of reasoning to argue against indiscriminate terror from whatever source it came. "We live in terror," he writes, "because man has been delivered entirely into the hands of history and can no longer turn toward that part of himself which is as true as the historic part, and which he discovers when he confronts the beauty of the world and of people's faces."

ALONG WITH HIS ARTICLES IN *Combat*, the present volume also includes a welcome interview with Camus about literature, which presents, even if only minimally, another and more important aspect of his multi-faceted career. His novel *The Stranger* had been seen as an example of the influence of the contemporary American novel because of the impassivity of the main character; and he agrees that "I used it ... because it suited my purpose, which was to describe a man who was apparently without conscience." But he adds that he hopes this technical influence would not become widespread, because it simply bypasses "the proper subject of literature ... the inner life. Man is described but never explained or interpreted."

He makes an exception for Faulkner, whose *Requiem for a Nun* he adapted for the stage, and he puts in a good word for Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. "But his book about Spain [*For Whom the Bell Tolls*]," he continued, "is a children's book compared to Malraux's *L'Espoir* [*Man's Hope*]." Camus objected to the "MGM love story" that Hemingway inserted "into the middle of the prodigious events that took place in Spain. You can't mix Hollywood and Guernica." (All through his *Combat* articles Camus keeps insisting that a legitimate Spanish republican government existed in exile, and should be recognized by the Allies against Franco.) While reserved about other recent American novels (he refers to Erskine Caldwell and Steinbeck), he expresses a reverence for "the great Melville, who died in squalor ... surrounded by his neglected masterpieces," and he refers to Poe and Hawthorne in the same terms.

FOR MANY YEARS THE REPUTATION of Camus remained under a cloud in France, even though his novels were widely read, because of his attack on Marxism in his *Combat* articles and then in his major philosophical work, *L'Homme révolté*, or *The Rebel*. The latter was greeted with scorn, especially in Sartre's journal *Les temps modernes*, and Camus was ridiculed for his "Red Cross mentality," and as merely a "philosopher for *classes terminales*" [the basic philosophy course taught in the last years of the French *lycée*]. But the collapse of Marxism, Maoism, and other leftist ideologies, which exercised such a strong grip in France for so many years, has led to a new and much more positive evaluation of Camus's point of view.

A recent issue of *Le Magazine Littéraire* devoted to Camus contains a dialogue between two important members of the older generation, Olivier Todd and Alain Finkielkraut, in which both acknowledge having changed their minds about Camus. Todd is particularly important in this context, because he was very close to Sartre (he called himself Sartre's "rebellious son"), and also because he is the author of a major biography of Camus that has not been bettered. Having spent five years of his life writing the biography, he now says that "I have altered many of my attitudes

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regarding Camus. Today, his personality pleases me very much. He was not only a genuinely sincere man but one who was truly virtuous—and courageous."

Finkielkraut, who admits to not having liked Camus "for political as well as philosophical reasons," now praises his courage in having attacked "icons of radicality" in *The Rebel* at a time when to do so was to invite the venomous repudiation that Camus in fact received. Also, he rejects Sartre's withering denigration of Camus as failing to attain the caliber of "a thinker" in that book. "He threw a huge brick into the Parisian swamp," writes Finkielkraut. "I see only George Orwell and Arthur Koestler as having done as much to open people's eyes." The new Pléiade edition of Camus's work now in preparation could thus not have come at a more propitious time.

CAMUS WAS KILLED IN AN AUTO accident in January 1960, carrying with him in a briefcase the manuscript of an unfinished novel called *Le premier homme*, or *The First Man*. This work remained buried among his papers, and was unearthed and published only in 1994; and this lapse of time indicates the relative disfavor into which he had fallen in the intervening period. Camus told a friend that this book was to be his first real novel, and so indeed it was. Just a few months before his death, he told another friend: "I've written only one-third of my work. I truly begin it with this book." Largely autobiographical, and intended as the beginning of a much more extensive evocation of his early Algerian years, the novel puts aside the ideological motivations that inspired Camus's earlier works and returns to his childhood. The book was a huge success, despite its uncompleted state. (Finkielkraut called it Proustian, because of the density of the sensations that Camus evokes.) The publication of *The First Man* did much to call attention to Camus again after thirty-five years, and helped to inspire the revaluation of his work that has now occurred.

For an American reader of the articles in *Combat*, written more than half a century ago, no words of Camus's strike home more forcibly than those in which he condemns indiscriminate terrorism on both sides. Caught as we are in a war against terrorism, what we euphemistically call "collateral damage" inevitably involves innocent civilians. No one has treated this issue with more poignancy and scrupulousness than Camus, who rejected all attempts to justify the murder of innocents in the name of French or Algerian nationalism. Nor would he, it seems to me, view the elusive aim of spreading American democracy to countries and peoples with a totally different history and culture as providing any such justification. The Arabs, he told his compatriots, "are a people of impressive traditions, whose virtues are eminently clear to anyone willing to approach them without prejudice." It is certainly impossible to read him now without thinking of such matters, and this gives his old journalistic forays a new and terrible immediacy. ■

Chloë Schama
The Name Game

APEX HIDES THE HURT
By Colson Whitehead
(Doubleday, 212 pp., $22.95)

COLSON WHITEHEAD IS CONcerned with in-between states. "What do you call that terrible length of time between when you see that your food is ready and when your waitress drags her ass over to your table with it?" he asks in his new novel. In his view, the solution to such an ambiguity lies in a name. The state of semi-irritated, mouth-watering expectancy, the protagonist of *Apex Hides the Hurt* decides, should be called "Tantalasia." Names in this novel are the grounding forces of unmoored elements, aligning things in a correct configuration.

"Tantalasia" is one of the novel's better coinages. The protagonist of *Apex* is a "nomenclature consultant" who makes a living condensing sensations into syllables, ensuring the success of a company's product by giving it a name that enhances its appeal. Although it is fairly simple to avoid a name that immediately gives offense—say, product names that become swear words when translated into other languages—appeal is a more complex phenomenon. A name intended to represent the properties of an object might express only a subjective experience of it. What suits one person might displease another.

But *Apex* is not a novel about marketing. Its real subject is the large-scale implications of the seemingly small-scale choices that are made in speech, especially speech that relates to race. The plot deals with a controversy surrounding the re-naming of a small town called Winthrop. Lucky Aberdeen, CEO and founder of Aberdeen software, spearheads the move to change the town's name, preferring "New Prospera" for obvious reasons. Albert (Albie) Winthrop, a descendant of the original Winthrop, resists the change. Regina Goode, the black mayor of the town, and a descendant of its first inhabitants (former slaves who migrated north from Georgia after the Civil War), wants to restore the town's original name, "Freedom." The nomenclature consultant has been brought in to try to create some sort of consensus of language and meaning in this racially fraught situation.

These characters are distanced from one another not only by their differing races, but also by thoughtless everyday speech. "Do you think Charred and Feathered would be a good name for a chicken joint?" Lucky asks the black protagonist. "Like a nationwide chain, big sign: Charred and Feathered. Mascot and everything." Even when confronted with less immediately insulting speech, the nomenclature consultant, who has meshed successfully with the overwhelmingly white world of corporate consulting, finds himself alienated from other races by certain modes of speech: "Truth be told, most of the time he didn't know what white people were talking about.... The words they used were strange, odd souvenirs, tiny fragments that had been chipped off an alien business meteorite. This was language from outer space." He "shivered each time Gertrude [a harmless librarian] used the word *colored*. He kept stubbing his toe on it.... Before colored, slave. Before slave, free. And always somewhere, nigger." He generally believes that the evolution of language

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advances a more humane mentality—"Negro" is better than "colored"; "Afro-American," or later, "African American," better than their antecedents; but he doubts anyone's ability adequately to use language in the representation of race. These iterations only "inch closer to the truth.... As if that thing we believed to be approaching actually existed."

SUCH METAPHYSICAL MUSINGS indicate that the complications of naming are not ignored by the novel. Whitehead acknowledges that the linguistic techniques of marketing will avail us little in the realm of history and identity. But *Apex* creates the expectation that Whitehead—an admired African American writer—will demonstrate some special competence, some genuine eloquence, on the subject of race and language. Why read a novel that recognizes the linguistic complications of a social issue, if not to be enlightened about a way around these complications?

But in this regard *Apex* consistently disappoints. The conflict in the novel is so starkly and simplistically drawn that it almost immediately assumes a dry allegorical tenor, reducing the people in the book to a kind of shorthand for cultural and historical forces. Whitehead's people are never quite individuals. More often they are occasions for the writer tiresomely to exercise his wit. A minor character is described as a "scruffy young white dude whose wrecked posture, rumpled clothes, and shallow expression marked a life of few prospects, and fewer misgivings about the lack of said prospects.... The name Skip was embroidered over the left breast of his striped mechanic's shirt, which meant in all probability his name was not Skip. Not Skip awkwardly steered a dolly onto the sidewalk." Denied even a name, "Not Skip" is the most drastic illustration of Whitehead's reluctance to flesh out his characters. The central figures at least have names, but they too are caricatures: Lucky is a confident, new-age entrepreneur; Albie is the withered remains of old money, still clinging to his decaying mansion; Regina is the righteous and over-achieving minority, come to make good in her hometown. As for the book's protagonist, he does not have a name. The nomenclature consultant lacks nomenclature. I am not sure what the purpose of his anonymity is, but it leaves a wounding cloud of portentousness over his head.

Even the protagonist—who, unlike the other characters, does not fall into a stereotyped mold—fails as a means to "inch closer" to a right way of speaking about race. At first he seems different, someone with at least the promise of a richer inner life—the discovery of his creativity, he reflects, was like the discovery of "a magnificent and secret landscape. His interior." But, as the triteness of those words indicates, rarely has an allegedly glimmering intellect appeared in a more lackluster form. Near the beginning of the book, upon arriving in Winthrop, he observes: "The best thing about the suburbs were the garages"; "He loved supermarkets"; "A neat little main drag, he thought." As the novel progresses, the prose becomes even more clichéd. (He gets the big case "because he was at the top of his game," he remains single because he "hadn't met that special someone.") Or it sounds merely empty ("his new apartment was great," "there is within, and there is without").

The spiritless prose of the protagonist enacts the argument that emerges as the central thrust of the novel: that the authority of eloquence is specious, that no one person is more entitled (or able) to name a town, or a race, or a human, than any other person. I suppose that is why Whitehead traps his supposedly brilliant wordsmith in a swamp of vapid contemporary idiom. But this has the effect of dulling his novel, of exposing a hollowness at the heart of its cleverness. "A name that got to the heart of the thing," the protagonist muses, "that would be miraculous." But there are no miracles here; not even the hope of one.

Whitehead has been both commended and criticized for the effusiveness of his writing. In these pages James Wood called the prose of his second novel, *John Henry Days*, "swaggering when it should be controlled, fruitlessly dense, grossly abundant," indulging in a "a squabble of excess." There is no "squabble of excess" in *Apex*, and in some places Whitehead's now more controlled method of abundance has yielded interesting and thoughtful results. He can be descriptively ingenious. In the storefront of Winthrop's more desolate businesses, "dead flies littered the bottom of the ancient window displays, out of reach of arthritic hands." And he can render the emotional implications of observed things: "on Saturdays he put on his old college sweatshirt and hunkered over the papers he had to get through by Monday a.m., as if putting on sweats could take the sting out of working on the weekend." The appeal of the suburban Mexican restaurant "belong[s] to that robust tradition of lone ethnic restaurants in the middle of nowhere, beloved by the natives in direct proportion to the lack of competition. The chips were greasy and delicious, and the promised margaritas of a firm, sandpaper variety that smoothed the bristled edges of the brain." But such literary inventiveness is not enough to redeem the book. It is fine to empty convention of significance, but this novel empties language as well. *Apex* is not only about the anomie of its protagonist, it is also an exemplification of it. It is a casualty of the empty world that it invents. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

same sour tone that Strom Thurmond used when he spoke of civil rights. This kind of contempt for the oppressed is something we could have gotten from Neville Chamberlain, Republican isolationist critics of FDR, or any Dixiecrat. If this is the new face of liberalism, the darkness is a lot closer to us than any resurgence of Newt Gingrich.

ROBERT B. BEATTY
Naperville, Illinois

SUNNY SLIGHT

BEINART REFERS TO A "PROZAC conservatism that stays sunny by escaping the real world." This is an inapt metaphor. Prozac is a medication that helps depressed people return to the real world and confront their problems. It doesn't make people "sunny." A better choice would be "kegger conservatism."

DAVID ROZENSON
Newton, Massachusetts

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

"Rank Disloyalty" (July 10 & 17) incorrectly stated that Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid had "explicitly ordered" Senator Max Baucus not to negotiate with the White House over Social Security privatization. In fact, Reid only cautioned Baucus about cutting his own deal with the White House.

The July 10 & 17 edition of TNR was actually issues 4,773 & 4,774, not—as listed in the table of contents—4,773 & 4,775. We regret the errors. ■

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Speed Freaks

THE WORLD CUP HAS ENDED and Wimbledon has been won, but for those still hungry for global competition, the Tour de France rolls on toward its Parisian finale on July 23. The race was already wide open when this decade's big drug scandal broke. In late May, a Spanish sting code-named *Operación Puerto* netted five people—including coaches from two professional racing teams and a former team doctor—in a secretive blood-doping program. The doctor's coded notes, along with phone records and videotapes, implicate more than 50 cyclists. Just before the Tour began, the Spanish authorities issued a 38-page précis of the investigation, which named dozens of Tour riders, including the race's overwhelming favorites, Ivan Basso and Jan Ullrich, as members of the doping ring. As a result of the ensuing suspensions and Lance Armstrong's retirement, the top five finishers from last year's Tour are all out of this year's race.

ARMSTRONG'S RETIREMENT HASN'T slowed the French press's relentless effort to prove that his seven victories were tainted by doping. The murky evidence and legal intricacies of the investigations are all but incomprehensible, but *L'Equipe*, the French sporting daily, runs each vague allegation under a screaming headline like "THE ARMSTRONG LIE." Armstrong has also been feuding publicly with Greg LeMond, the only other American to win the Tour. LeMond claimed in late June that Armstrong had threatened "my wife, my business, my life" over his public criticism of Armstrong's consultations with a controversial Italian doctor. But LeMond's more remarkable claim was that cycling was a clean sport back in the 1980s, when he raced. Like most retired athletes, he has a rose-colored view of his own era. The Dutch racer Joop Zoetemelk has the distinction of being the first cyclist to test positive for steroids, in 1979—which didn't keep him from winning the Tour in 1980. And, two years after LeMond's first win, the Spanish climber Pedro Delgado won the Tour despite testing positive for probenecid, a drug whose only use to an athlete is as a masking agent for steroids. But, as it wasn't yet proscribed for cyclists, Delgado kept his crown. LeMond's "clean" era was, in reality, the Age of Anabolic Steroids.

DOPING HAS BEEN A PART OF CYCLING since the Tour was founded in 1903. Back then, riders carried *la moutarde*—water bottles laced with everything from caffeine and opiates to ether and cocaine. The Tour's first doping scandal came in 1924, when the Pélissier brothers quit the race and complained about the conditions to a muckraking journalist. He dubbed Tour riders the "convicts of the road" and stressed the pharmacy they carried with them on every stage—cocaine, chloroform, and pills they referred to as the "dynamite." After World War II, amphetamines took over. (They were readily available in part because they'd been supplied in vast numbers to the Allied troops in Europe.) When asked if he took *la bomba*, as the pills were called, the Italian champion Fausto Coppi, who dominated the sport in the late '40s and '50s, replied, "Only when I have to." Pressed to define when that was, he acknowledged, "Almost all the time."

AMPHETAMINE USE CAME UNDER THE spotlight during the 1967 Tour, when the British rider Tom Simpson collapsed and died on the long, hot climb up Mont Ventoux. Before his death, Simpson had nicely summed up the riders' attitude toward drugs: "If it takes ten to kill you, I'll take nine." The Tour's organizers made a public show of new doping controls, but the riders rebelled, and it all got swept under the carpet as quickly as possible. As five-time Tour champion Jacques Anquetil said in response to all the handwringing, "You'd have to be an imbecile or a hypocrite to imagine that a professional cyclist who rides 235 days a year can hold himself together without stimulants."

AND THERE'S THE RUB. CYCLING'S popularity has always been based in part on the spectacle of physical suffering. Henri Desgrange, the Tour's founder, had initially wanted to make the race so challenging that only a single rider would finish: a Calvary with the winner determined not by speed but survival. For more than a century, the Tour has been a display of man overcoming his own physical limitations. Both LeMond and Armstrong added to this mythology by returning from near-death experiences—LeMond was shot in a hunting accident, Armstrong was stricken with testicular cancer—not just to race again, but to win the Tour.

THE SIGNATURE MOMENT OF THE LAST decade was Armstrong looking back at Ullrich as he accelerated up Alpe d'Huez in 2001. Armstrong seemed to be saying, "Come on, let's go," to Ullrich, who could only focus on trying to keep a steady pace as the American charged away to victory. After six hours of riding over mountain passes, Ullrich simply couldn't go any faster. He was at the limit of human endurance. It was a typical maneuver for Armstrong, who used a simple method to win the Tour: Attack forcefully on the first mountain stage and drop all your rivals to gain the lead. Everyone knew exactly what he was going to do, yet, year after year, no rider could stay with him. It was the "called shot" of cycling.

SUCH MOMENTS ARE WHY, DOPING scandal or no doping scandal, the Tour will always be thrilling to watch. On the second stage this year, Matthias Kessler made a perfectly timed attack six kilometers from the finish, and the commentators all thought he had the win sewn up. Fifty meters from the line, though, the charging mass of riders caught him. Kessler shook his head in despair as dozens shot past him. Twenty-four hours later, he attacked off the front again, on the vicious Cauberg climb in Valkenberg, Holland—only 800 meters but at a 7.3 percent grade—and held off the pack to take a glorious, fist-pumping victory. After riding 134 hard miles, he should have been exhausted. Instead, he was elated—as was I by the brilliant racing and a just victory.

ROBERT MESSENGER

Robert Messenger is on the staff of THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY.

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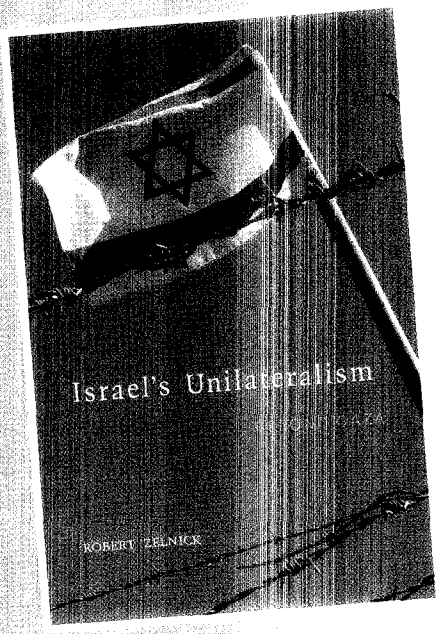
New from the Hoover Press

Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza–how and why did it happen?



"If there is a single book that can tell us where Israel stands today and where it is likely to go from here, it is this one."

—Salameh Nematt,
Washington bureau chief for Al-Hayat *newspaper*

"Bob Zelnick's study of Israeli unilateralism fills two important needs: for academics, it is a comprehensive initial examination of an issue that will dominate Israeli-Palestinian relations for years to come; and for policy makers, it is a primer on the next steps in the peace process. Zelnick's thorough review of Israel's disengagement policy sets the stage for understanding why the consensus within Israel has shifted so dramatically in support of Israeli-Palestinian separation. The extensive interviews conducted by Zelnick add depth and color to this insightful study."

—Daniel C. Kurtzer
Former United States ambassador to Israel and Egypt and the S. Daniel Abraham Visiting Professor of Middle East Policy Studies at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs

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